Dickens's Pantomimic Vision in His Early Comic Novels(Dissertation_全文)

AUTHOR(S):

Kai, Kiyotaka

CITATION:

Kai, Kiyotaka. Dickens's Pantomimic Vision in His Early Comic Novels. 京都大学, 2003, 博士(文学)

ISSUE DATE:

2003-01-23

URL:

https://doi.org/10.14989/doctor.k9850

Dickens's Pantomimic Vision in His Early Comic Novels

Kiyotaka Kai

DICKENS'S PANTOMIMIC VISION IN HIS EARLY COMIC NOVELS

by

Kiyotaka Kai

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

KYOTO UNIVERSITY

2002

Contents

Introduction

In the middle of the twentieth century, after the years of neglect from academics, Dickens's novels were received as important literary work that merited serious attention, and since then, he has been one of the most frequently discussed English writers. The critical change was occasioned by the discovery of the darker side of Dickens's personality and his vision, the exploration of his literary technique such as the use of symbolism that organizes the whole work, and the emphasis on his social criticism that allegedly comprehends Victorian society at large. Then it is not surprising that in most of the critical works on Dickens, there has been a tendency to pay more attention to his later "dark" novels than to his earlier ones, since what caused the twentieth-century critical appreciation of Dickens, or of the novel in general, is mostly found in his later ones. Like the nineteenth-century readers who nostalgically and regretfully found a lack of comic exuberance in Dickens's later works, many deplore the comparative neglect of comic energy of his writing by the twentieth-century critics, who disparaged the comic energy, associating it with vulgar, popular culture

incompatible with the élitist culture that they belonged to.[1]

It seems obvious that Dickens's early novels should be appreciated more properly in the context of the popular culture of his time, a topic which is now treated seriously by the literary critics. Recently, relationships between Dickens and contemporary popular culture have been explored especially by Paul Schlicke, whose highly influential work, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, gives a historical account of the nineteenth-century popular entertainment represented in Dickens's writings. Dickens's works are, as Schlicke convincingly demonstrates, inseparable from popular entertainment no matter how vigorously critics may try to account for his works in terms of élitist culture. It would be reasonable to think that Dickens's involvement with popular culture manifests itself not only in the direct presentation of the various kinds of popular entertainments that Schlicke considers, but also in various aspects of his creative imagination. In this respect, the contemporary popular theatre is most obviously related to his fiction because both deal with representation of fictional worlds.

The popular entertainment can serve as the main theme of a novel; the most telling example is provided by *Hard Times*, where the dichotomy of "Fact" and "Fancy" is articulated in favour of "Fancy," which is largely represented by popular entertainment. On another obvious level, many of his novels have characters who engage in the popular theatre, like the

---

[1] For a general survey of the conflict between the exuberance that has been associated with Dickens's popularity and the control that academic critics have attempted to find in his works, or between "force" and "form", see Steven Connor's "Introduction" to *Charles Dickens* (1-33).

Crummleses in *Nicholas Nickleby*, or Wopsle in *Great Expectations*. In addition, Dickens's writings contain a wide range of vocabulary related to the theatre. Yet, these kinds of direct references to the contemporary theatre are, though important for the understanding of Dickens's art, not the main object of this study; what I am concerned with here is the manner of presenting fictional worlds that Dickens and the Victorian popular theatre have in common, and its significance particularly for his early comic novels.

The nineteenth-century English theatre has not attracted great attention from literary critics, partly because of its vulgarity, so that it is not easy to know in detail the theatre that Dickens was familiar with. Melodrama was arguably dominant on the Victorian stage, but the early nineteenth century witnessed a confusion of dramatic genres and forms including burlesque, extravaganzas, burlettas, melodramas, revues, pantomimes, and comic operas. These genres were not clearly defined, but had overlapping characteristics. It would be misleading to say that melodrama was of greater importance than the other genres for Dickens, who was fully involved in the theatre as a writer, an actor, and an audience. It is more likely that, regardless of the differences between genres, Dickens was concerned with the contemporary popular theatre in general.

In the consideration of how Dickens shares creative principles with the contemporary theatres, I am much indebted to William F. Axton's *Circle of Fire: Dickens' Vision and Style and the Popular Victorian Theater*, which, though published in 1966, still remains the best work of this kind. However, my emphasis is different from Axton's. His work is pervaded with the mid-twentieth century critical tendency that emphasizes the psychological

realism and conscious organization of Dickens's fiction. In addition, while Axton deals with all of Dickens's novels and their development, I am concerned with Dickens's early novels, and each of the following chapters is focused on more specific aspects of them. For similar reasons, Robert Garis's *The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels* is, though quite valuable, insufficient for the revaluation of Dickens's early novels; his study puts too much emphasis on morality, psychological realism, and structural organization, and mainly discusses Dickens's later novels.

Nevertheless, Axton's attention to "the artistic attitudes, modes of vision, and general procedures" that Dickens and the contemporary stage shared is highly helpful for our present concern for his peculiar art of fiction. Axton attributes the variety of genres and forms that flooded the Victorian popular theatre to "the harlequinade tradition" (18). Descended from *commedia dell'arte*, harlequinade constituted an integral part of pantomime in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The traditional English pantomime, as Dickens and his Victorian readers knew it, is roughly divided into two distinct parts: opening and harlequinade. The opening was followed by the harlequinade, or comic business, where the regular characters of the pantomime play an acrobatic, irrational farce with a loose plot.

Edwin Eigner makes a good study of the issue of the influence of English pantomime on Dickens, though his study is not sufficient for our present interest because he devotes most of his attention to configurations of pantomime personages in Dickens's novels, especially *David Copperfield*, in what seems to be a rather farfetched manner. In my view, the consideration of the exuberant energy of Dickens's early novels, what should be accounted

for is not so much the influence of the specific genre of pantomime, as the creative imagination shared by Dickens and his contemporary popular theatre.

Some features of English pantomime make it representative of the Victorian popular theatre, and therefore are essential to the understanding of Dickens's early novels. The first scenes, or the openings, of pantomime, which are usually based on fairytales, nursery rhymes, legends, or well-known historical events, have as their chief characters an authoritative old figure, his beautiful daughter, a young man who wins her love, occasionally a wealthy rival lover, and the comic servant or old dame. When, balked by the old man and the rest, the love of the young hero and heroine is about to reach an impasse, a benevolent fairy intervenes and transforms the scene with a wave of a magic wand, or bat, or slapstick. The transformation sets off the harlequinade, where the chief characters become the regular pantomime personages mainly descended from *commedia dell'arte*: old man becomes Pantaloon, the young lovers Harlequin and Columbine, and the rest Clowns. The pursuit of the couple by the team of Pantaloon and his followers (Clowns) goes on in a series of episodic scenes where almost invariably the lovers confront a crisis, but are saved by the magic wand given to Harlequin by the fairy, which has the power of instantaneously transforming the scene, or, the object or the characters on the stage. In addition, these knockabout scenes are interrupted by almost unrelated pieces like dances and comic songs. The absurd knockabout pursuit of the harlequinade continues till the dark scene, where, in a gloomy setting, the couple is cornered in an apparently impossible impasse. Then, the benevolent agent intervenes again to effect

magically the grand transformation followed by the final scene where everything is put to rights in harmony in a luxurious setting.[2]

One of the most notable features in this general description of pantomime in relation to our present concern is the rapid transformation of scenes, which effected mixture of incongruous elements. Axton regards the Regency pantomime as "a curious amalgam of fantasy, realism, topicality, anachronism, grotesquerie, burlesque, spectacle, music, verse, dance, and a serious story" (20). Because of its conspicuous mixture of heterogeneous elements, pantomime can be regarded as representative of the nineteenth-century popular theatre, for other dramatic genres such as burlesque, extravaganza, and melodrama are more or less marked by interweaving of various elements. Michael Booth adds to the characteristic features of melodrama "the rapid alternation between extremes of violence, pathos, and low comedy" (*Prefaces* 25). Dickens was fully aware of this mixed nature of melodrama. In an often-cited passage of *Oliver Twist*, the narrator refers to the custom of melodrama in order to justify his own organization of the novel:

> It is the custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular alteration, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon. (117)

---

[2] For more detailed accounts of the Regency pantomime, see Mayer, especially the chapter, "The Structure of Pantomime, 1806-1836" (19-74). Dickens himself favourably describes a pantomime piece and the audience's response to it at the Britannia Theatre in "Two Views of a Cheap Theatre," *The Uncommercial Traveller* (32-33).

Although what is directly mentioned here is melodrama, the alteration of scenes is more radical in pantomime in that it instantaneously achieves changes of the scenes in an outstanding manner. It will not be necessary to limit what the author has in mind in the "streaky bacon" passage to the specific genre of melodrama; it is very likely that in the minds of Dickens and his contemporaries the popular theatre in general was remarkable for the mixture of miscellaneous elements.

In the following lines of the "streaky bacon" passage, Dickens attempts to justify the apparent incongruities in melodrama on the ground that they reflect real life: "The transitions in real life from well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning weeds to holiday garments, are not a whit less startling" (118). He also applies the conception of *thetrum mundi* to pantomime in "The Pantomime of Life": "A pantomime is to us, a mirror of life" (74). This suggests that his novels, which also mirror real life, are representations of the realities that he sees in the pantomimic vision.

It is important that the narrator of *Oliver Twist* likens the construction of this novel to that of melodrama, or the Victorian popular theatre, in respect of its incoherence. Generally, the nineteenth-century novels tend to jumble up heterogeneous elements in their lengthy forms, but, among them, Dickens's novels most remarkably mix a variety of genres, discourses, and modes, and consequently appear to lack a formal unity. Arguing that the unbounded world that Victorian people saw in Shakespeare is congenial to the novel form, Peter Conrad writes that "Shakespeare's blend of tragedy and comedy leads . . . to the novel, which also takes up his blend of high and low, the sublime and the grotesque" (33). Partly because both

Shakespear's plays and the popular dramas in the nineteenth century had a tendency toward heterogeneity, both appealed to their contemporaries; Dickens's enthusiasm for Shakespeare is therefore consistent with his love of the contemporary popular entertainments. Actually, Shakespeare is indissolubly connected with popular entertainment in Dickens's writings as, for instance, Nicholas and the Crummles troupe stage *Romeo and Juliet* in *Nicholas Nickleby* and Pip sees Wopsle play a part of Hamlet in *Great Expectations*. [3] Significantly, linking his own writing activities to Shakespeare's in rendering real life into literary works, Dickens associates the great predecessor with pantomime in the conclusion of "The Pantomime of Life":

> "All the world's a stage,
> And all the men and women merely players:"
>
> and we, tracking out his footsteps at the scarcely-worth-mentioning little distance of a few millions of leagues behind, venture to add, by way of new reading, that he meant a Pantomime, and that we are all actors in The Pantomime of Life. (83)

The popular theatre's confusion between multiple genres, discourses, or modes is more conspicuously seen in Dickens's early novels, though the later ones also have a considerable degree of multi-voiced or polyphonic

[3] An elaborate catalogue of references to Shakespeare in Dickens's writings is compiled by Valerie L. Gager (251-369).

nature.[4] Many critics agree that *Dombey and Son* is Dickens's "first major novel"[5] because the "unity" is achieved, or at least attempted by the conscious handling of the author after this work. For instance, Kathleen Tillotson finds "one of differences between *Dombey* and its predecessors" in the "deliberate control of comic exaggeration and inventiveness": "the comedy is in lower relief and is subordinated to the design of the whole" (159). To put in another way, in Dickens's early novels before *Dombey* the "design of the whole" does not seem to operate efficiently and comic subplots conflict with or even overpower the main plot, or rather there is no main plot to speak of. "In Dickens," says Peter Conrad, "the eccentrics rebel against their confinement in the subplots and take over the novels" (42). Such a tendency is seen in his early novels in more drastic manners. In his recent study of Dickens's early novels, John Bowen suggests that the twentieth-century criticism was at a loss to interpret "their alleged incoherences and lapses" (3), though it is doubtful whether he adequately deals with such "incoherences and lapses" in his book.[6] I believe that Dickens's apparently inconstant manner of writing his early comic novels comes from the vision that he shared with the contemporary popular theatre notably in transformations in pantomime, and that his imagination in this sense diverges from the popular entertainment in the later novels.

---

[4] Roger Fowler and Roger D. Sell explore Bakhtinian polyphony respectively of *Hard Times* and *Dombey and Son*.

[5] F. R. Leavis titles the chapter on *Dombey* "The First Major Novel" (21).

[6] Dealing with transgression and radicalism seen in Dickens's novels, sometimes resorting to contemporary critical theory, Bowen's unsystematic approaches seem as well or better applicable to the later novels.

The mixed structure is characteristic of the early comic novels I deal with in the following chapters: *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Martin Chuzzlewit*. This choice is not arbitrary. Perhaps largely for the reasons mentioned above, *Dombey and Son* has been the critics' favourite in the twentieth century, and copious studies have been published year after year whereas critical works on its immediate predecessor, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, are few and far between in comparison. I exclude *Oliver Twist* mainly for two reasons. First, *Oliver Twist* is not really a neglected child but has been well cared for throughout the century. Second, partly because of its comparatively short length, it seems to assume a relatively homogeneous structure. For a similar reason, *Barnaby Rudge* is not dealt with here. This novel, though surely neglected, is different from the selected four novels in that it is a historical novel, and that the author seems to check his imagination in his rendering of the historical facts so that it is more uniform in structure than the other early novels.

As *The Pickwick Papers* was intended to be a series of sketches to garnish illustrations, it may be said that it does not belong to the genre of the novel from the beginning; in this respect, this book fundamentally assumes a hybrid form. The series of events that have little to do with one another may be thought of as unified in the comical atmosphere where Mr Pickwick and his friends experience various adventures and make ridiculous blunders especially in the first half of the book, but such a unity is disrupted by the interpolations of gloomy tales which bring utterly alien elements into the farcical main story. Furthermore, Mr Pickwick's imprisonment in the Fleet prison in the latter half assumes a profoundly different tone. The other three

novels, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Martin Chuzzlewit* similarly show blends of multiple discourses in themselves; in each of them, incongruous elements coexist, and often sharply contradict and clash one another. Some aspects of this problem will be discussed especially in the first and second chapters of this thesis.

By jumbling up various genres or heterogeneous worlds in a novel, Dickens destabilizes fixed standards that each genre upholds in something like a carnivalesque atmosphere which, as Bakhtin puts it, "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order" (10). As Michael Hollington says, the carnival spirit as Bakhtin envisages it was inherited by Dickens partly through pantomime, and other comedic genres of the contemporary popular theatre.[7] What Hollington has in mind by referring to the carnivalesque is the tradition of grotesque art, which he sees is central to Dickens's imagination. Axton too takes "the grotesque" as "governing spirit" of the nineteenth-century theatre. According to him, the grotesque, the nineteenth-century theatre, and Dickens all "play with disorganization and incoherence between functions, disproportion or incongruity between scales and contexts, or unexpected transposition of realms" (28).

The ambivalent effect of the grotesque art is characteristically created by the juxtaposition of incongruous elements which pantomimic transformations achieve on the stage. Dickens's novels are grotesque in the sense that heterogeneous worlds stand side by side or clash one another

---

[7] Hollington, *Dickens and the Grotesque* 8-12.

within them. Among them, *The Old Curiosity Shop* is perhaps the most grotesque novel principally for its "central" image of the contrast between an innocent, beautiful heroine and grotesque people and objects. The Chapter Three of this thesis deals with the problem of the grotesque in this novel, where the concept of the grotesque, which is inherently ambivalent, becomes all the more complex because the discrete spheres into which this apparently disproportionate book is broadly divided deal with the grotesque in different ways.

The unexpected combinations that are suggested by pantomimic transformation are reflected in or shared by Dickens's stylistic features as well as the heterogeneity of genres in a whole novel. Admitting the view that *Dombey and Son* was a turning point that marks the transition from "Boz" to "Dickens", or from the young Dickens to the mature Dickens, David Musselwhite argues that the "radically decentred and aggregatively collective, rhizomic, style" was abandoned by this shift (181). What Musselwhite calls "rhizomic style", borrowing the term from Deleuze and Guattari, in some way resembles the grotesque voice of Dickens, which Axton shows is "derived from the transformations of early Victorian pantomime." According to him, pantomime and Dickens share "a world-distorting vision that suddenly incongruously, yet convincingly transmutes commonplace objects and settings into quite dissimilar things, that juxtaposes realms, contexts, functions, scales, and shapes while yet indicating some arresting and unforeseen likeness, and that intermixes anachronistic materials without committing itself to wholehearted acceptance of either side of the equation" (163). Dickens's descriptions of scenes often teem with numerous details, and

in the "rhizomic" aggregates of miscellaneous people and objects, "distinctions and categorizations . . . refuse to stay in place," because they are "essentially volatile, elusive, nomadic."[8] Thus, some of the general features of grotesque art, such as the exuberant collection of heterogeneous elements and the subversion of normal categories, are achieved within a passage in Dickens's descriptive prose; in this way, pantomimic transformations operate not only on the confrontations of seemingly incompatible genres, or worlds, in a novel, but also within a passage that describes physical environments in the grotesque style.

Arguably the most characteristic of Dickens's grotesque is his animistic sense of the material world in which the animate becomes the inanimate, and vice versa.[9] According to Martin Meisel, "Transformation, and especially the animation of the inanimate, were essential to the pantomime genre" (99). The Regency pantomime not only showed fantastic transformations of inanimate objects worked by the magic wand, but presented clowns who "went disguised as kitchen implements, animals, outsized vegetables, even plants and trees."[10] Both in pantomime and Dickens, the normal demarcation between human and non-human is made uncertain in a comically grotesque manner.

Although Axton argues that Dickens's grotesque style is exclusively used for the description of scenes, it also operates in the descriptions of

---

[8] Musselwhite, 178.

[9] On this matter, see Dorothy Van Ghent's "A View from Todgers's" and the chapter on *Great Expectations* in *The English Novel* (154-70).

[10] Axton, 19-20.

characters. On Dickens's character descriptions, Brian Rosenberg writes: "In fact it becomes increasingly difficult to understand a world where one is continually being bombarded by so much data and where, moreover, the significance of the data is neither consistent nor certain" (54). But, despite his elaborate analysis of blurring style in Dickens's characterization, Rosenberg is misleading when he argues that Dickens's descriptive style becomes "more circuitous, hesitant, and polysemous" in the later "dark" novels. Most of the tactics of "blurring" that Rosenberg numbers in his analysis of the description of Maggy in *Little Dorrit*, are found no less frequently in the early novels. I am not alluding to "vague and unspecific" descriptions of unearthly, angelic heroines like Rose Maylie in *Oliver Twist*, who is not presented with enough physical details for the reader to visualize them clearly.[11] My point is that comic and/or grotesque characters are described with exuberant details charged with incongruities and contradictions. For instance, the very first description of Mr Pickwick is not straightforward: "A casual observer, adds the secretary, to whose notes we are indebted for the following account . . . might possibly have remarked nothing extraordinary in the bald head and circular spectacles" (*Pickwick Papers* 4). Here viewpoints of multiple observers are presented: the editor-narrator's, the secretary's, and the hypothetical "casual" observer's. The use of multiple perspectives is, according to Rosenberg, one of the blurring devices, manifesting the author's uncertainty in representing the external realities. The presentation of Mr Pickwick, however, seems to suggest Dickens's confidence in rendering the pluralistic vision that he shares with

---

[11] See McMaster 6-7.

the Victorian popular theatre. The other features of blurring such as qualification or contradiction by "but" or "though" (Rosenberg 55), qualification by the use of words like "seems," "appears," "may," "might," "could," "would," "about," and "perhaps" (56), "proliferation of ingenious and sometimes elaborate visual images" by metaphors and conditionals (59-60), and excessive repetition (61) are most frequently resorted to in descriptions of grotesque characters.

Far from coming from Dickens's own doubt about representation of the external world, these linguistic features seen in the early novels are typical of the grotesque style. Exuberance and proliferation generated by them are what Dickens's descriptive prose and pantomime transformation have in common. The resultant instability, in his early comic novels, expresses "a joyful and triumphant hilarity" of the carnivalesque.[12] It is true that the grotesque style of descriptive prose is also employed in Dickens's later novels to a great extent, but it tends to be more subordinate to the general control of the novel. Descriptions in the early Dickens are, in contrast, "pleasantly subversive in the way that theatrical burlesque was subversive" as Axton says of *The Pickwick Papers*. Dealing with *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the Chapter Four of this thesis examines its descriptive prose suggestive of pantomimic transformations.

The vision of pantomime dominates Dickens's early comic novels, manifesting itself on various features of the texts. Such vision represents the realities not as static entities, but as dynamic, elusive ones, and thus

---

[12] Bakhtin 30. Citing this phrase, Hollington says that it "might be an appropriate phrase to describe Dickens's early comedy" (*Dickens* 6).

expresses the multifariousness inseparable from the art of popular entertainments, which aspires to liberation from fixed, stagnant conditions by destabilizing the standards that are dominant in various phases of life. Dickens's early comic novels, as one of the most important parts of the nineteenth-century popular entertainment, tend towards such pluralistic worldviews through the pantomimic vision.

Chapter 1

The Pickwick Papers: Fragmentation, Digression, and Proliferation

It is difficult to identify a unifying theme or principle of each of Dickens's novels. Among the early novels that are more disorganized than the later ones, his first full-length novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, is particularly notable for its lack of unity. Many critics have tried to find a unifying theme in this novel, but their attempts are almost inevitably tinged with arbitrariness. Criticizing the critical tendency to force unity on this novel, Anny Sadrin writes that "fragmentation suited" Dickens, dominating his writing all through his career (22-23). Turning to an earlier generation of Dickens criticism, G. K. Chesterton sees *Pickwick* as "not a novel at all" but "something nobler than a novel" mainly because this work cannot claim to have "a plot and a proper termination" (79).[1]

It would be misleading to say that this novel does not claim any unifying principles at all. Especially, the latter half of the novel has a consistent plot that goes from Mr Pickwick's trial for breach of promise

---

[1] Chesterton paradoxically concludes that this book "has even a sort of unity in not pretending to unity" (82).

through his imprisonment into the Fleet. From the fact that the early parts of the novel are more incoherent, it will be reasonable to surmise that the fragmentary nature of the novel results from the circumstances in which Dickens started to write it: he had to commence *Pickwick* with hardly any plans; shortage of time demanded of him improvised composition; and the publishers originally demanded from him a collection of fragmentary episodes.[2] The actions and scenes in the book seem to succeed one after another without any pretensions to thematic integration. Dickens himself acknowledges that this book may be taken to be "a mere series of adventures"; in the preface to the first edition of *The Pickwick Papers*, he writes:

> The author's object in this work, was to place before the reader a constant succession of characters and incidents; to paint them in as vivid colours as he could command; and to render them, at the same time, life-like and amusing. . . . And if it be objected to the Pickwick Papers, that they are a mere series of adventures, in which the scenes are ever changing, and the characters come and go like the men and women we encounter in the real world, he can only content himself with the reflection, that they claim to be nothing else, and that the same objection has been made to the works of some of the greatest novelists in the English language. (41)

---

[2] On the circumstances in which *The Pickwick Paper* was written, see in particular Butt and Tillotson 62-57.

As this comment was written after he completed the novel, it is reasonable to suppose that, for Dickens himself, the novel lacks thematic integration from beginning to end. Even in the latter half of the novel, one can find much of heterogeneity. The fragmentary features of this novel are most conspicuous in the independence of the episodes from one another and especially in the interpolation of the tales that have little to do with the main story. It is true that these features are more notable in the first half, but in reality they persist to the end of the novel. I submit that the fragmentary nature of the novel is not only coerced from outside factors like the circumstances of publication, but caused by the novel's artistic concern.

However, one should not think that this book is fragmentary in the sense that the whole is cut into parts that are insulated from one another. These fragments are joined together to make a grotesque whole which is not harmoniously unified but incongruously collected. Sadrin examines fragmentation in *Pickwick* at three levels—narrative, linguistic, and thematic—but it seems insufficient to concentrate on the fragmentary aspects of the novel, if one ignores the significance of these details being coalesced to form a massive collection called *The Pickwick Papers*. Her argument seems a little farfetched when she emphasizes the theme of fragmentation or mutilation as if the whole book were driven to disintegration. More important is the fact that seemingly disconnected elements that she recognizes in the book are joined, that incongruous parts are juxtaposed side by side.

What David Musselwhite calls "rhizomic structure" is more appropriate for the consideration of heterogeneous aspects of *Pickwick* than Sadrin's notion of fragmentation. Regarding this novel as "Dickens's most rhizomic

work," he writes:

> *Pickwick* is a compendium of collective registers and multiplicities and its humour, as well as its seriousness, derives most of all from a delight in incongruities, impossible coincidences, incredible connections and improbable alliances. This rhizomic delight in the collective and the heterogeneous, in multiplicities, rather than in individuals and proprieties, is manifest at every level . . . . (182)

The "rhizomic," miscellaneous nature of this novel is largely derived from Dickens's pantomimic imagination that he shared with the contemporary popular theatre. Finding that various genres of the popular theatre are coexistent in this book, William Axton argues, "*Pickwick Papers* successfully defies ready categorization and remains an inhabitant of that elusive world of grotesquerie whose geography is uncomfortably changeful" (65). As both Musselwhite and Axton suggest, what the discordant structure of *Pickwick* emphasizes is not so much rupture but proliferating conjunction that brings about successive transformations as in pantomime.

In my opinion, the novel is driven by an impulse toward proliferation, rather than disintegration. With what Musselwhite looks upon as the "rhizomic delights" working "at every level," the impulse toward proliferation manifests itself at various levels of the text. In this chapter, first, I examine the significance of proliferation of details at the level of descriptive prose. And then, after the characters' inclination for digression is considered, I concentrate on acts of storytelling pervading the whole book; this is followed

by the analyses of the two major storytellers, Sam Weller and Alfred Jingle. Through these considerations, I wish to show that the heterogeneity of this novel is created through Dickens's unique imagination, which is inseparable from popular theatre.

Details in Descriptive Prose

The Pickwick Papers opens with the meeting of the Pickwick Club, at which Mr Pickwick expresses his "desire to benefit the human race", and decides to travel around the country (5). At the end of the novel, however, he no longer possesses such an overweening ambition but sees his adventures as serviceable only for his private self, no longer mentioning his concern for the "human race" in general: "numerous scenes of which I had no previous conception have dawned upon me—I hope to the enlargement of my mind, and the improvement of my understanding" (773). The disparity between the initial object and the final achievement seems to mark the protagonist's shift of perspectives from the abstract to the concrete.

If the most important experience that he goes through in the process of his change is to personally witness the scenes of the Fleet prison, this culminates in his retirement in his own room: "'I have seen enough,' said Mr Pickwick, as he threw himself into a chair in his little apartment, 'My head aches with these scenes, and my heart too. Henceforth I will be a prisoner in my own room'" (627). Just before this desperate determination, he once again walks around in the prison for inspection, but the sordid scene he beholds is depicted untypically in terms that neglect details. Garrett Stewart acutely finds in *The Pickwick Papers*, "a certain generalizing bias." (48-49). The

description of the tour Mr Pickwick takes immediately before the retirement may serve as a good example of such a bias:

> There were the same squalor, the same turmoil and noise, the same general characteristics, in every corner; in the best and worst alike. The whole place seemed restless and troubled; and the people were crowding and flitting to and fro, like the shadows in an uneasy dream. (627)

This description reflects the perspective of the protagonist, who, overwhelmed by the squalor inside the prison, can no longer distinguish between details of the scene. In his decision to retreat into his own room, Mr Pickwick tries to strengthen a barrier by isolating himself from the surrounding realities that he has generalized. One should note, however, that generalization is not characteristic of the views of Mr Pickwick and the novel in general. The protagonist has a curious eye for details from the beginning, as "his note-book in his waistcoat, ready for the reception of any discoveries worthy of being noted down" (9) illustrates. In fact, his innocent curiosity is essential to the whole book in that it is made up of "a series of adventures" which are eagerly hunted after by him, and that its comic effects largely rely on his almost excessive curiosity. In a sense, his curious mind is temporarily suspended in the Fleet prison. The generalized vision discloses the prevailing despair that endangers the protagonist's comic resiliency. Isolating himself from the miseries around is not the way to deal with the overwhelming realities in this novel, which sanctions the collective rather than the individual, as

Musselwhite suggests.

However, generalized descriptions are not typical of the prose in the novel; even in the midst of the most repugnant scenes, descriptions rendered by the narrator tend to include miscellaneous details. The first lengthy description of the scenes inside the prison, which the narrator says Mr Pickwick peeps into with "great curiosity and interest" gives attention to specific objects:

> Here four or five great hulking fellows, just visible through cloud of tobacco-smoke, were engaged in noisy and riotous conversation over half-emptied pots of beer, or playing at all-fours with a very greasy pack of cards. In the adjoining room, some solitary tenant might be seen, poring, by the light of a feeble tallow candle, over a bundle of soiled and tattered papers, yellow with dust and dropping to pieces from age: writing, for the hundredth time, some lengthened statement of his grievances, for the perusal of some great man whose eyes it would never reach, or whose heart it would never touch. In a third, a man, with his wife and a whole crowd of children, might be seen making up a scanty bed on the ground, or upon a few chairs, for the younger ones to pass the night in. And in a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and a seventh, the noise, and the beer, and the tobacco-smoke, and the cards, all came over again in greater force than before. (561)[3]

[3] Musselwhite cites the paragraphs including this passage as an instance of "the strangely immediate mode of description" (182-83).

This quotation is only a part of the longer description that exhibits not only various kinds of prisoners and their properties but also their backgrounds like their personal history and miserable fate which a detached spectator could not see at a glance—how can Mr Pickwick know that the tenant of the second room "writing, for the hundredth times, some lengthened statement of his grievances" only by looking at him casually? However, the sympathetic rendering of the suffering is no more than one part of the whole description dealing with discordant attitudes of the prisoners: irresponsible dissipation, illusory hope, and utter poverty.

Such variety and incongruity, as well as the entailing grotesqueness, come from the vision that Dickens shared with the contemporary popular theatre. Proliferation of details in descriptive passages is characteristic of the nineteenth-century novels, especially in the early Dickens, and his first novel—a collection of heterogeneous subplots in itself—is dominated by a mode that jumbles the miscellaneous objects. As we have seen, at the level of the descriptive passage in this novel, details are hardly subordinated to the whole, clashing with one another in the unharmonious, grotesque agglomeration. This incongruous mingling of miscellaneous concrete details greatly contributes to the impression that this work presents a fragmentary form.

Characters and Digression

At the departure form the Fleet prison, Mr Pickwick feels bitter distress for the prisoners; in addition, he suffers some degree of mortification when he is

released from the prison in that he reluctantly agrees to pay reparations, yielding to the circumstances and the wishes of his friends. Nevertheless, on the next morning—after no more than one line in the text—he sets off on a new journey by coach with a "light and cheerful" heart (650). In this novel, traveling often means a shift to an utterly different world in which characters acquire new existences. As the novel starts as a series of incidents that originate from Mr Pickwick's purpose of "extending his travels, and consequently enlarging his sphere of observation" (3), the hero and other characters repeatedly move from one place to another. Even some of the interpolated tales are associated with travels, among which the last one, "The Story of the Bagman's Uncle," is especially interesting since, in it, the mail-coaches take the bagman's uncle literally to a fantastic world in defiance of time and space. It seems as if the whole novel is obsessed with traveling. These movements in transition not only serve to effect locational changes, but claim their own spheres isolated from both the starting place and the destination. In most cases, the worlds created by the spatial movements enliven travelers.

The journey to Birmingham immediately after Mr Pickwick's release from the prison is undertaken for the purpose of reporting Winkle's hasty marriage to his father, and asking for his forgiveness, but such objectives are temporarily neglected in the hilarious atmosphere in which Bob Sawyer shows eccentricities by exchanging hats with Sam Weller, eating and drinking and yelling on the top of the chaise, and erecting a red flag. Although at first manifesting his displeasure at Bob's extravagances out of regard for propriety, Mr Pickwick gradually relents and even starts to involve himself in the

merriment, which makes up an alternative, uninhibited space. Such travel seems to produce a sense of liberation by the motions and changes. Reproached by Mr Pickwick for his eccentricities, Bob makes an excuse: "only I got so enlivened with the ride that I couldn't help it" (684). The movements in travel have effects of making the originally merry person even merrier.

Likewise, in pursuit of Jingle with the serious intention to retaliate the villain, Mr Pickwick becomes so mollified under the influence of the enlivening scene seen from the coach that he forgets the original purpose of the journey, and his resentment against the villain: "he derived as much enjoyment from the ride, as if it had been undertaken for the pleasantest reason in the world" (210). In such a spatial movement, characters are allowed to live new lives in an utterly different world, extricating themselves from stagnancy.

According to James R. Kincaid, one of the lessons that Mr Pickwick has to learn is "that the power of resiliency in the life force is greater than the depressing powers of institutions" (*Dickens* 39). However, the hero possesses such resiliency, though he may be ignorant of its worth, even before the hard experiences of the Fleet prison, as is illustrated in the repeated journeys by coach. The novel gives many examples of such resiliency from the outset. The frequent demonstrations of recovery by various characters accelerate fragmentation of the novel in that each incident leaves few traces to the next one. J. Hillis Miller observes that "Mr Pickwick at first yields himself to a life made up of unrelated adventures separated from one another by a vacancy of sleep and forgetting" (*Charles Dickens* 21). Such a vacancy evidences the presence of ideal resiliency, which is not lost even in the latter half of the novel as is shown in Mr Pickwick's quick recovery from the influence of the prison.

As movements in travel tend to achieve a temporary liberation from the ordinary stagnant states with many restrictions, professional drivers are likely to have great resiliency because of their constant movements. The most conspicuous driver in the novel, Tony Weller, appears to be a perfectly uninhibited character except that he is harassed by his wife and Stiggins. His occupational resiliency seems to manifest itself in his conception of turnpike keepers, of whom he has an understandably negative view because their static presence disturbs drivers by stopping their movements and consequently breaking the illusion that they live in a world of freedom. Thus, for Tony, turnpike keepers are "all on 'em men as has met vith some disappointment in life" (298), and to be a keeper is "something desperate" tantamount to committing suicide (763). Turnpike keepers are killjoys who intrude themselves to announce the limitations of the shifting to another sphere in travel; it is ultimately impossible to be liberated from the restrictions imposed by institutions, common sense, and, natural laws.

Tony and Sam Weller apparently behave most freely in the novel, but even they suffer considerable restraints in the real world. Especially, it is rare that their urge for violence is wholly satisfied. It is true that they repeatedly participate in the scenes of violence, but their impulses for destruction are not sufficiently gratified by the petty violence actualized in such scenes. Their verbal atrocities are really far more brutal than their physical violence. Although Tony bestows "a look of deep, unspeakable admiration on his son" when Sam suggests that "if . . . that 'ere Stiggins came and made toast in *my* bar, I'd . . . [p]oison his rum and water" (365), the aggression is in word only. Besides, even though he displays his affection for his wife after her death, he

more often than not betrays destructive impulses toward her. For instance, informed by Sam that she is taken ill through alcohol, Tony's countenance wears an expression "not of dismay or apprehension, but partaking more of the sweet and gentle character of hope" (592). Likewise, his son often evinces a desire for violence, but he can hardly have it gratified. He is restrained by external authority when Mr Pickwick forbids him to attack Job Trotter in revenge. In addition, although he is overjoyed to receive from his master permission to "knock down" Winkle in order to fetch him back, he does not really resort to violence in this mission. On the contrary, he even prevents his master by force from pouncing on his sworn enemies, Dodson and Fogg. Thus, the Wellers do not give themselves up to rash violence; that is, they are bound to common sense.

It is necessary that the Wellers should reconcile themselves with the restrictions that are inevitably imposed on them in real life, insofar as they are "tutelary spirits who watch over Pickwick and keep him in touch with the solid earth."[4] However, they often appear to yearn for liberation from the restrictions. Tony sometimes falls into a fit of laughter which bursts from his physical body: "the old gentlemen shook his head from side to side, and was seized with a violent swelling of the countenance, and a sudden increase in the breadth of all his features" (614). His own body is too small to contain his potential energy; the grotesque, almost explosive "swelling" of the body seems to symbolize his underlying urge to be disengaged from the physical restrictions.

---

[4] Marcus, *Dickens* 52.

The Wellers betray their latent aggression mainly in word, or, one might rather say, they resort to verbal expressions in order to escape from the restrictions of real life. Besides, in scenes that demand some sort of restraint, Tony sometimes finds a temporary liberation in physical gestures that can be regarded as harmless and almost childish. A good example is found in the performance that Tony gives behind the back of Stiggins while the hypocritical preacher is delivering a sermon to Sam: "he furthermore indulged in several acts of pantomime, indicative of a desire to pummel and wring the nose of the aforesaid Stiggins: the performance of which, appeared to afford him great mental relief" (617). He never goes any further than the mock violence here probably because he behaves with regard for propriety in his own way, but his self restraints are not forcible enough to check the childish performance. Similarly, in the tense situation where Mr Winkle reads his son's letter begging forgiveness for his abrupt marriage, Bob Sawyer cannot help indulging in a silent performance of making grimaces: "Mr Bob Sawyer, whose wit had lain dormant for some minutes, placed his hands upon his knees, and made a face after the portraits of the late Mr Grimaldi, as clown" (691). It is likely that Bob also resorts to this infantile act in order to get "mental relief" as Tony does. From the fact that both Tony and Bob suppose that their performances are not witnessed by those who will be offended by them, it is inferred that they are not so free as to defy propriety completely. Their eccentric behaviours may be seen as expressions of their impulses toward digression.

Sam also draws on grimaces when he carries Mr Pickwick in a wheelbarrow for hunting. Prohibited by his master to laugh at Winkle's

blunder in shooting, Sam facetiously distorts his face: "by way of indemnification, Mr Weller contorted his features from behind the wheelbarrow, for the exclusive amusement of the boy with the leggings" (249). A little later, prevented from telling an anecdote, he resorts to grimaces again: "Mr Weller winked the eye which was not concealed by the beer-can he was raising to his lips with such exquisiteness, that the two boys went into spontaneous convulsions" (254). In both cases, his facetious performances draw laughter from the servant boys. One may suppose that Sam and the boys concur in secret opposition against their social superiors whose oppressions more or less restrain their freedom of action. Sam is certainly allowed a great extent of liberty, but it cannot be denied that he subjugates himself to his master. Although Mr Pickwick bears affection or even respect for Sam, he sometimes betrays condescension or arrogance about being socially superior. Asked by Peter Magnus whether Sam is his friend, he answers no, taking sides with Magnus, not Sam:

> "Not exactly a friend," replied Mr Pickwick in a low tone. "The fact is, he is my servant, but I allow him to take a good many liberties; for, between ourselves, I flatter myself he is an original, and I am rather proud of him." (295)

Here, before appreciating Sam's originality, he emphasizes that Sam is in his possession. Although his reproof of Sam's laughter at Winkle may be explained as a consideration for his friend, one can also take it as peremptory since he takes the lead in denouncing Winkle before Sam laughs, so that it is

possible to detect haughtiness on Mr Pickwick's part. In the stressful situations where the master asserts his authority over the servant, Sam's grimaces can relieve the oppression to some extent.

It is important for the consideration of the impulse toward digression pervading the novel that Sam's grimaces serve as "indemnification" for impudent laughter. This suggests that the desire that should be satisfied by laughter is more or less appeased by the seemingly childish performances. It may be taken as an act of transgressing the social code to ridicule a friend of one's master; although Sam's impertinent laughter is counted as an example of the liberties he often enjoys in defiance of the normal order, he does not always act just as he likes, but, in most cases, behaves properly in his social position. Consequently, his laughter itself can be regarded as motivated by his impulse toward liberation from the everyday repression, if not from direct oppression by his master.

Wishing to deviate from the normal course which imposes various kinds of restraints, many comic characters in the novel share the impulse toward digression, which encourages the fragmentary nature of the novel because the unrelated adventures and incidents are what they seek for. As the principal characters are urged toward digression, the whole novel can hardly take one fixed direction. From another perspective, this book itself, with so many "incoherences and lapses", seems to be driven by the impulse for digression, which is embodied by the characters.

Appetite for Storytelling

The impulse toward digression is most frequently reveals itself in storytelling

in *Pickwick*. It is noteworthy that, whereas Sam is reproached by his master for his impertinent laughter preceding the distortion of the face, Mr Pickwick interdicts him from telling stories before he facetiously winks: "Have the goodness to reserve your anecdotes till they are called for" (254). As his grimaces compensate impudent laughter, his jocular wink in part serves as a substitute for the act of storytelling. Therefore, it seems right to suppose that storytelling and childish physical gesture have the same direction, the direction motivated by impulse toward digression.

Harald Weinrich distinguishes between two groups of tenses in European languages, "commentary tenses" (present and future tenses in English) and "narrative tenses" (past tenses) which create respectively the "discussed world" ("*besprochene Welt*") and the "narrated world" ("*erzählte Welt*"). The attitude of commentary tenses is characterized by tension because the participants (the speaker and the receiver) are spontaneously involved in the discussed world, whereas narrative tenses are more relaxing in that the participants are not demanded for direct response to the narrated world no matter how important or serious the information that the narrated world conveys may be. Thus, in a general tendency, a switch from the discussed world to the narrated one effects the change of attitude from tension to relaxation. [5] In *The Pickwick Papers*, frequent transitions from commentary to narrative in tense are obviously occasioned by many interpolated tales and anecdotes, marking the direction to relaxation. In the way that movements in travel achieve the actual diversion from a fixed spot as

---

[5] Weinrich 30-35.

we have seen, storytelling more easily enacts transition to another, relaxed world by the shift in tense. Since relaxation is what Tony's pantomimes and Bob's grimaces aim at, it would be reasonable to think that the motive of the eccentric acts and that of storytelling are akin to each other.

The appetite for narratives is not exclusively on the side of the teller. Sam's grimaces are hidden from Mr Pickwick, but draw laughter from the boys who see it, that is, effects relaxation on the audience. In a similar manner, storytelling gives the hearer "mental relief" that Tony Weller receives from his own pantomimic gesture. Garrett Stewart points out that one of the interpolated tales in the novel is "therapeutic" for the mind of Mr Pickwick (40). Even though the tale Stewart refers to, "The Madman's Manuscript", is not verbally spoken but written, it will not be inappropriate to the consideration of the attitude on the side of the receiver of narratives. The content of "The Madman's Manuscript" is, as the title suggests, far from easing the worn-out mind, but insofar as Mr Pickwick "soon fell fast asleep" (152) in the wakeful and restless night after reading the tale, it has relaxing effects probably because the violent lunacy extending throughout the tale is confined in the narrated world, insulated from reality. When Mr Pickwick falls ill in bed suffering from rheumatism, Sam devotedly attends him and endeavors to "amuse his master by anecdote and conversation." After that, Mr Pickwick edits what Sam has told him, and demonstrates his own strength by telling his friends the tale, "The Parish Clerk: A Tale of True Love" (228).

As I have said, fragmentation of *Pickwick* is most conspicuously demonstrated by the existence of many interpolated tales. On the ground that the number of the formal interpolations decreases in the latter half of the

novel, the first half may be seen as more fragmentary. However, anecdotes in fact do not become less, for many characters casually tell stories even in the latter half. For instance, in the Fleet prison, Sam relates various anecdotes, and one of the prisoners, a cobbler, tells Sam a comparatively lengthy story of his own experience. If one includes the various stories told by characters, the number of the stories within this novel is overwhelming as if the whole book is possessed by an obsession for telling stories one after another. The novel originally starts with the premise that the narrator is working as editor who compiles the materials gathered from experiences of Mr Pickwick and other Pickwickians so that, unlike an omniscient narrator, the narrator of this novel should command limited knowledge, informed only of Pickwickians' experiences. One may suppose that this necessity causes the adoption of the imbedded forms in which varying intelligence is verbally given to Pickwickians by other characters; taking it into consideration that even the information directly related to the main story is imparted through voices of someone, one may attribute the copious number of stories to the narrator's faithfulness to his position as editor. For instance, Tony is first introduced in Sam's anecdote; the story given by Wicks, one of the clerks in Dodson and Fogg's office, illustrates wickedness of the lawyers; private lives and histories of minor characters are often elicited from the stories narrated by themselves. In fact, however, the narrator's position as editor is almost forgotten in the course of the novel. Even in an early part, the information that the narrator could not possibly have in the position of editor is conveyed to the reader. For instance, no one but Jingle himself can tell how he secretly conceives the plan to seduce Rachael, a spinster. In addition, it is not to Pickwickians but to

Jingle that Sam talks about his father by way of introducing him to the reader. Although many anecdotes more or less function to give information necessary to the main story, one cannot ascribe the copious imbedded stories to the limited range of direct knowledge on the part of the editor-narrator. It is more adequate to say that the desire for storytelling, which is shared by many characters, dominates the whole novel, which consequently presents the loose form as a collection of unrelated stories.

Such a desire is plainly recognized in anecdotes that are told by certain characters but not disclosed in the text. The readers are not given the content of Bob Sawyer's "agreeable anecdote, about the removal of a tumour on some gentleman's head" (401) or of Dowler's "variety of anecdotes, all illustrative of his own personal prowess and desperation" (483). Moreover, there is even a character who cannot tell a story properly though his desire to do it is manifestly presented. At Bob Sawyer's party, "the prim man in the cloth boots" eagerly seizes an opportunity to tell an anecdote:

> The instant the glasses disappeared, he commenced a long story about a great public character, whose name he has forgotten, making a particularly happy reply to another eminent and illustrious individual whom he had never been able to identify. He enlarged at some length and with great minuteness upon divers collateral circumstances, distantly connected with the anecdote in hand, but for the life of him he couldn't recollect at that precise moment what the anecdote was . . . . (453)

Even the "divers collateral circumstances" are not enunciated in the text, but at least one thing is clear: he wants to tell a story. Like him, most characters in this book are eager to tell and hear, and retell and rehear stories.

The later novels of Dickens have many characters who indulge in storytelling, but none of them can be compared to *Pickwick* in abundance of masterly storytellers. All the characters Barbara Hardy counts among "the early professionals" in storytelling are from this novel: Jingle, the Wellers, and the bagman.[6] The later masters in storytelling tend to have the content of their stories related to the main plot of the novel, for instance by betraying his or her own personality through them. The world that Mrs Gamp creates by storytelling in *Martin Chuzzlewit* discloses her selfishness because it in many cases serves to advertise her merits. Such a function can be found in some of the imbedded stories of *Pickwick*, but most of them, especially those told by the professional storytellers, bear little relevance to the main plot if any. The anecdotes within this novel seem to have hardly any apparent functions but to gratify the characters' appetite for storytelling—a notable manifestation of the prevalent impulse toward digression.

Sam Weller and Wellerism

The most prominent storyteller in this novel, or arguably in all of Dickens's novels, is Sam Weller. One of the reasons why Mr Pickwick decides to employ him must be his unique gift for storytelling. Critics like W. H. Auden take it as the central theme of *Pickwick* that the innocent protagonist comes to face,

---

[6] "Dickens's Storytellers", 71.

or to accommodate himself to, reality.[7] According to this view, Sam is regarded as a champion of, or a mentor to, Mr Pickwick. James R. Kincaid and Christopher Herbert regard one of Sam's anecdotes, the story of "the man as killed his-self on principle" (599-601) as critical of, and edifying for, the protagonist. In the peculiar relationship between the ignorant master and the well-informed servant, storytelling often serves as a means for the latter to make a display of his knowledge so that the ignorance of the master is emphasized in contrast. Certainly, in the sense that Sam's anecdotes often impart worldly knowledge to the innocent man, one can say that his storytelling has an educational effect. However, his anecdotes are not exclusively directed to his master; he is ready to tell stories to anyone. For instance, he amuses Emma and Joe, servants at Wardle's, by the anecdote about "the old gen'l'm'n as wore the pigtail" (381). In this light, the edification of Mr Pickwick does not fully explain Sam's repeated acts of storytelling. The narrator says that Sam "was always especially anxious to impart to his master any exclusive information he possessed" (414), but it is hard to find the educational value of the ensuing anecdote about a sausage-making machine, a sensational story that, after disappearance of a master of pork shop, his buttons are found in sausages manufactured by the new machine. It is not

---

[7] Auden writes: "The conclusion I have come to is that the real theme of *Pickwick Papers* . . . is the Fall of Man. It is the story of a man who is innocent, that is to say, who has not eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and is, therefore, living in Eden. He then eats of the Tree, that is to say, he becomes conscious of the reality of Evil but, instead of falling from innocence into sin . . . he changes from an innocent child into an innocent adult who no longer lives in an imaginary Eden of his own but in the real and fallen world" (408-09).

easy to imagine what purposes many of Sam's stories should meet for the education of Mr Pickwick. Rather, their instructive effect on his master is only secondary to his impulse toward storytelling.

As Sam begins to tell the anecdote of the sausage-making machine when the pork shop happens to come in sight, his storytelling is generally occasioned by objects or situations around him. From the immediate situations, Sam also creates something shorter than anecdote, that is, wellerism, a fixed form of language used repeatedly by Sam and occasionally by Tony, in the pattern: "___, as X said, when . . . ." The first example comes the moment Sam makes his first appearance as a boots at the White Hart Inn: "No, no; reg'lar rotation, as Jack Ketch said, wen he tied the men up" (125). In this example, an alien world of the historical hangman suddenly emerges into the sphere of routine work of polishing boots. It might be reasonable to think that wellerism is a minimum kind of story insofar as it satisfies the most basic requisites of a narrative: "The recounting . . . of one or more real or fictitious events communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) narrators to one, two, or several (more or less overt) narratees."[8] At least one can safely say that the use of wellerisms can gratify the appetite for storytelling in that they can achieve the liberation from the real world verbally, as anecdotes do, in a minimalist way.

Critics tend to examine the character of Sam in his relationship with the education of Mr Pickwick. It is true that he fulfills the important function to protect the protagonist from, and initiate him into, the real world, and that

---

[8] Gerald Prince, *Dictionary of Narratology*, 58.

some of the wellerisms have such function, but this is no more than one aspect of them. Florence Baer's close examination of wellerisms starts with her preconceived idea that they are intended to initiate Mr Pickwick into the real world, though she is in doubt about the effectiveness.[9] In my opinion, Sam does not intend to educate Mr Pickwick by wellerisms except a few occasions, because he resorts to wellerisms in various situations whether his master hears him or not. For instance, he uses a wellerism even in his Valentine letter: "So I take the privilidge of the day, Mary, my dear—as the gen'lm'n in difficulties did, ven he valked out of a Sunday . . . " (445). The wellerisms may instruct Mr Pickwick and readers by referring to the harsh realities as Baer suggests, but such a functionary aspect is not so conspicuous as miscellaneous hilarity in them. To Mr Pickwick's remark on the cold weather, Sam replies: "Fine time for them as is well wropped up, as the Polar Bear said to himself, ven he was practicing his skating" (398). Baer finds in this example "the analogy between roly-poly Pickwick and the Polar Bear, well insulated from the cold and other miseries that winter brings to the unprotected" (177). But it is not so easy to detect the analogy between Pickwick and the Polar Bear, and furthermore the implication about "the unprotected"; the mention of the strange animal is needless for the sarcasm, though indispensable for the completion of the basic pattern of wellerism. In truth, it is the sudden appearance of the rare animal that attracts attention before everything. Sam may be willing to make a satiric remark on the comfortable life that rich

[9] In a similar vein, casting a doubt on the education of Mr Pickwick, Philip Rogers argues that the interpolated tales are ineffectual to the protagonist (32-34).

people like Mr Pickwick spend, but the apparently incongruous juxtaposition seems to mitigate the sharpness of the sarcasm.

Baer further attempts to generalize the significance of wellerisms from the psychological perspective: "The wellerisms incorporate socially acceptable utterances and belligerent, destructive acts"; and she goes on to conclude that Sam's subconscious hatred and resentment against his real father, Tony, and his "father-surrogate" Mr Pickwick, find vent in this form (181). Her argument has merit in examining both the functions of wellerisms and their underlying psychological source, but it is problematic to infer the hatred against the father from the form of wellerism. The essential feature of wellerism as a form of language as I understand it lies in the sudden intrusion of a different, fantastic world into the immediate situation, which is effected by the linking function of the all-powerful "as".

Considering wellerism as a form of comparison, J. Hillis Miller pays attention to the "comic incongruity" brought about by it.[10] Perhaps one can say no more than this about the form of wellerism; generalization about it is only possible in point of its surface pattern: it links two utterly different worlds together. It is important to note here that one of the two situations compared in the form of wellerism is Sam's (or Tony's) utterance in a less relaxing commentary tense, in response to the immediate context of the real world. Wellerisms instantly and easily achieve the transition from the "discussed" world to the "narrated" one, the real world to an alternative one, as anecdotes told by characters do. It is true that most of wellerisms contain

---

[10] Miller, "Sam Weller's Valentine" 116.

brutal, savage images, but they are safely confined in the "narrated" world where one can be immune to normal restrictions without any direct consequences on reality. In addition, many materials of the unreal worlds, including brutal ones, that appear in wellerisms are collected from what Paul Schlicke categorizes in the older popular entertainments.[11] Dickens's attachment for the traditional forms of entertainment does not solely come from nostalgia for his childhood; in defense of the older entertainments, as Schlicke points out, Dickens emphasizes "the need of the solitary individual, struggling to alleviate the burdens of his or her life in imaginative release" (*Dickens and Popular Entertainment* 7). The close relationship of wellerisms to popular entertainment confirms their tendency towards relaxation. Transcending time and space, and other limitations of physical laws as well as cultural restraints, the wellerisms provide the shortest ways to an alternative world, where violence is released without serious consequences, death is no longer threatening, and rare animals begin to speak and practice skating. The worlds conjured up by wellerisms are hilariously liberating rather than destructive.

It has been pointed out that Sam is the authorial projection in the novel.[12] He can be also seen as the embodiment of the impulse toward

---

[11] Baer lists the topics of "the street scenes" in wellerisms, which are "nostalgically remembered by nineteenth-century readers of *Pickwick Papers*": "The pieman, the dogs'-meat man, the peepshow and penny theatre performances of Blue Beard and Doctor Faustus, the coloured pictures of Edmund Keane as Richard III, pantomimes of the Battle of Waterloo, exhibitions of freaks and of performing animals" (177-78). These are properly regarded as instances of the traditional popular entertainments.

[12] See, for instance, Marcus "Language" 199, and Miller *Charles Dickens* 2-3.

digression that pervades the whole book. Given the opportunity to exercise his gift of storytelling by the position of Mr Pickwick's servant, Sam strives to display his skill by telling stories to his master. His situation is similar to the author's, as Dickens, at the outset of his career as a novelist, was very likely to be seized by the impulse to show off his talents. In the character of Sam, one might suspect the drive of the young novelist to break through the original plan proposed by the publishers.

Like Sam and Tony Weller, many characters in *Pickwick* share the impulse toward digression. It may be right to say that they embody the impulse that drives the whole novel which consequently presents a seemingly fragmentary form. In this novel, the impulse toward digression is thus represented both in its form and its characters.

Dashes in Jingle's Speech

Alfred Jingle is, though possibly second to Sam, among the most masterly storytellers of Dickens's novels. Sheer quantity of the anecdotes he tells sufficiently represents the general appetite for storytelling in the novel. Furthermore, his peculiar manner of storytelling enacts the novel's proliferation of miscellaneous fragments.

One of the most remarkable linguistic innovations in the early part of *The Pickwick Papers* is Jingle's verbal "system of stenography" (92). Karen Chase argues that Jingle's speech goes towards disintegration with its elliptical syntax whereas the wellerisms integrate disconnected objects. This opinion is not quite right, since the dashes in fact connect fragments in Jingle's speech rather than disintegrate a whole. It is true that Jingle violates

syntax, but it would be misleading to say that he gives up "the logical ordering" as Chase says (31-37). His speech is actually lucid enough for other characters and readers to follow the thread of his anecdotes. For instance, there is no confusion about the content of the anecdote about his dog:

> Ah! you should keep dogs—fine animals—sagacious creatures—dog of my own once—Pointer—surprising instinct—out shooting one day—entering enclosure—whistled—dog stopped—whistled again—Ponto—no go; stock still—called him—Ponto, Ponto—wouldn't move—dog transfixed—staring at a board—looked up, saw an inscription—"Gamekeeper has orders to shoot all dogs found in this enclosure"—wouldn't pass it—wonderful dog—valuable dog that—very. (15)

Note that Jingle's dashes leave intact the relatively long inscription on the board: "Gamekeeper has orders to shoot all dogs found in this enclosure." This shows that, even if he considerably resorts to ellipsis, his expression preserves a cluster of words which, if separated any further, would lose its meaning. Such avoidance of disintegration in Jingle's language will be even clearer if one compares it with another fragmentary speech given by a foreign philosopher, Count Smorltork: "Pig Vig or Big Vig—what you call—Lawyer—eh? I see—that is it. Big Vig.' Even after Mrs Leo Hunter corrects him for the mistake about the name of "Pickwick," Count Smorltork goes on to disjoint the name: "Peek—christian name; Weeks—surname; good, ver good. Peek Weeks. How you do Weeks?" (205). It is not a mere matter of

idiolect, for, whereas "Pickvick" pronounced by the Wellers just emphasizes their Cockney quality, "Pig Vig," "Big Vig," and "Peek Weeks" mutilate the original and make up meaningless words out of it to the point of sheer absurdity.[13] Jingle's manner of storytelling is on the contrary orientated towards the proliferation of meaningful details as is illustrated in the last fragmentary segment of his speech I have just quoted, "very": it should be regarded not as separated from the preceding ones but as added to them in order to qualify and confirm them backwards; it is not a broken piece, but a complement. Most of the fragments may be grammatically incomplete, but they independently convey their own information unmistakable enough to dispel the idea that Jingle's speech aims at decomposing.

At one point, his speech does fall into utter unintelligibility so that his attendant, Job Trotter, must explain what he means when he replies to Perker's admonition not to waste the sum of money offered by Mr Pickwick:

> "Not lost," said Jingle, hastily. "Pay it all—stick to business—cash up—every farthing. Yellow fever, perhaps—can't help that—if not—" Here Mr Jingle paused, and striking the crown of his hat with great violence, passed his hand over his eyes, and sat down.
>
> "He means to say," said Job, advancing a few paces, "that if he is not carried off by the fever, he will pay the money back again. If he lives,

[13] Anny Sadrin casually refers to Count Smorltork's tampering with the name as an example of "linguistic amputations and distortions," but her argument seems too general in that she includes any unusual styles in the category of "linguistic fragmentation" (30).

> he will, Mr Pickwick. I will see it done. I know he will, sir," said Job, with energy. "I could undertake to swear it." (724-25)

However, the unintelligibility of Jingle's words in this example does not come from his peculiar stenographic manner of speech as such; here his heartfelt gratitude for Pickwick's generosity deprives him of his characteristic volubility because words are lost in tears. At other points of the early part of the book, the Pickwickians fail to understand what he means, but most of the misunderstandings are no more than revelations of their naiveté.

The fragments in Jingle's speech comprise various kinds of information: images, sounds, impressions, summaries of events, comments, and so on. His unique way of composition may be comparable to the business of the editor-narrator of *Pickwick*, who is presumed to collate documents, letters, and manuscripts to present a "narration in a connected form" (8). Jingle's speech seems to demonstrate this practice by joining various kinds of fragments to form a whole anecdote. Steven Marcus shrewdly suggests: "Jingle is an approximation of uninflected linguistic energy. . . . He brings us into closer touch with the primary process" ("Language" 191). It might be exaggerating to say that one can trace the "primary process" of language in general by examining Jingle's idiosyncratic manner of speech, but, at least, his words suggest the process of composition. Of course it is too simplistic and too arbitrary to attempt to explain away the complicated process of composition, but what I want to emphasize here is that Jingle's storytelling works toward creation, neither destruction, nor mutilation. His speech seems to be intermediate between the primal chaos where discourse is about to be

generated and the completed passages that constitute a polished story.

It is necessary to make some modification to the epithet "telegraphic" for Jingle's verbal eccentricity, because it applies more appropriately to each cluster of his words than his whole speech. Turning back to the piece of speech about his dog quoted above, one can see that one of the fragments, say, "dog of my own once", is elliptical enough to be called "telegraphic" with no subject or verb. And yet Jingle is so verbose and his words are so copious that it seems irrelevant to designate his whole speech as telegraphic or elliptical. The last addition, "very," and the apostrophe to the dog, "Ponto", can be even labeled as unnecessary details that ought to be omitted in telegraph. These fragments, apparently superfluous, are greatly significant in terms of relaxing, entertaining aspects of storytelling. In fact, Jingle's speech, especially when he tells anecdotes, is more for entertainment than for deception, for it is not clear how his anecdotes serve for personal profit. In order to enlarge the duration of entertainment, his idiosyncratic speech can add details as he likes to enlarge the narrated, relaxing world.

Although each segment in Jingle's speech is made of a meaningful cluster of words, its meaning is highly dependent on the meanings of the preceding and following phrases. This is made clear especially when the unintelligibility of his words cannot be entirely attributed to Mr Pickwick's ignorance:

> "Eh?" said Jingle. "Spout—dear relation—uncle Tom—couldn't help it—must eat, you know. Wants of nature—and all that."
>
> "What do you mean?"

> "Gone, my dear sir—last coat—can't help it. Lived on a pair of boots—whole fortnight. Silk umbrella—ivory handle—week—fact—honour—ask Job—knows it."
>
> "Lived for three weeks upon a pair of boots, and a silk umbrella with an ivory handle!" exclaimed Mr Pickwick, who had only heard of such things in shipwrecks, or read of them in Constable's Miscellany.
>
> "True," said Jingle, nodding his head. "Pawnbroker's shop—duplicates here—small sums—mere nothing—all rascals." (583-84)

Since Mr Pickwick's counter exclamation, "Lived for three weeks upon a pair of boots and a silk umbrella with an ivory handle!" is just what Jingle means, this misunderstanding does not result from Jingle's unique syntax. Mr Pickwick is more confused by the peculiar phraseology than by the stenographic manner of speech. The misunderstanding could possibly be avoided if he were acquainted with the connotations of the first segments, "spout," and "Uncle Tom."[14] Mr Pickwick's interpretation would be rational in certain circumstances such as "in shipwrecks" or "in Constable's Miscellany," but what Jingle offers here is not an enigma insofar as his narrative is presented plainly enough if only the narratee is familiar with the phrases used by Jingle.

Each fragment of Jingle's speech does not exist independently; the

---

[14] The Notes of Everyman Dickens edition of *Pickwick* give the explanation of "spout" and "uncle": "The spout was the lift or shoot by which deposited goods were sent from the shop front into the store. 'Uncle' is slang for pawnbroker" (804).

connections of one part to another are essential to his skilful storytelling. Dashes in his speech may perform varied functions such as that of suggesting a flow of time between segments, or making utterances rhythmical, according to the context, but their most fundamental functions are to separate one segment from another, and, at the same time, to relate one to another. In this sense, Jingle's speech epitomizes the book's central pattern of fragmenting and joining. *Pickwick* is a collection of miscellaneous smaller parts, which are on their turn made up of incongruous, proliferating details.

Accommodation and Freedom in *The Pickwick Papers*

Although Anny Sadrin recognizes a theme of mutilation in *The Pickwick Papers* and all of Dickens's works, mere mutilation is not what this book offers as I have tried to show; the important point is that heterogeneous fragments are pieced together. Sadrin supports her argument by Dickens's lifelong fascination with "wooden legs" (30-34). John Carey, to whose words she refers, is not totally concentrated on mutilation; although he also puts rather too much emphasis on the aspect of fragmentation in "wooden legs," his suggestion is quite helpful when he locates human figures with artificial parts in their body at the "interland between life and non-life" (*Violent* 90). In my opinion, it is largely because of conjunction of human bodies with alien matters rather than mutilation that Dickens is so much attracted to wooden legs or other artificial body parts. A person with a wooden leg is literally an embodiment of incongruous combination, which is one of the main features of *The Pickwick Papers*. The novel does not undergo amputations, but rather proliferate itself by accumulating seemingly unnecessary details and

ramifying in multiple directions with the total effect of exuberant energy.

Conjoining of heterogeneous fragments reflects two of the book's thematic concerns: accommodation and freedom. Asked whether he is a Blue or a Buff, Bob Sawyer replies to Mr Pott, "I am a kind of plaid at present; a compound of all sorts of colours" (699). The whole of *The Pickwick Papers* is neither a Blue nor a Buff, but "a kind of plaid, a compound of all sorts of colours"; it resolutely refuses to keep championing any one-sided view. What the protagonist has to learn and seems to achieve is to abandon his narrow-minded "principle", and compromise himself to the real world even though it is teeming with evils in various forms. The fragmentary nature enables this book to form a many-coloured plaid pattern, where the pantomimic vision is predominant.

Mr Pickwick's accommodation to the world affords him freedom both from the Fleet prison and from his own obstinate principle. Outside the prison, however, there are many constraints placed on him and all other characters. The copious digressions in *Pickwick* help them to liberate themselves from these limitations even though it may seem rather escapist and irresponsible. Especially, storytelling is a typical way of digressing from the static reality in that it enables not only the storyteller but also his audience to go beyond the present moment, to the relaxing, narrated world.

Mark M. Hennelly Jr is rather too optimistic when he concludes that the ideal harmony between work and play is sought in *Pickwick* and is realized especially in the character of Sam Weller. Even if Dickens seeks such a harmony in his later career, his first novel tends to praise childish, foolish enjoyment completely separated from work. The example that Hennelly

proposes to illustrate the achieved harmony is Sam's interruption of Mary's work.[15] But it is actually no more than interruption that obviously diminishes the efficiency of the work. Play is nearly always the opposite of work in this book. Kincaid persuasively comments on *Pickwick*: "That the novel is the most compelling vehicle for regression in our culture is not open to dispute" (*Annoying* 25). It is not to say that the book is childish and irresponsible, for children could not fully appreciate the innocent enjoyment praised in the book, or understand the necessity of it.[16] The burgeoning of miscellaneous fragments, which causes scenes to change one after another, reflects the spirit of play inseparable from popular entertainment, and liberates one from being imprisoned in any one static time and space. Thus *The Pickwick Papers* keeps going on and proliferating.

---

[15] Hennelly, "Dickens's" 44.

[16] Auden writes in praise of *The Pickwick Papers*: "though no boy is innocent, he has no clear notion of innocence, nor does he know that to be no longer innocent, but to wish that one were, is part of the definition of an adult" (409).

Chapter 2

Nicholas Nickleby: The Melodramatic of the Crummles Troupe and the Main Characters

In the consideration of the nineteenth-century English popular theatre, melodrama, arguably the most predominant genre, cannot be ignored. The concept "theatricality" in this period was inseparable from melodrama because this genre was so influential and marked by such extravagant, excessive performance. It gained enormous popularity, and its influence was not limited to the stage but was so widespread throughout the contemporary society that traces of melodrama could be found in divers cultural contexts; the "melodramatic mode", according to Elaine Hadley, permeated not only "language and speeches" but also "nonlinguistic forms of representation—physical gestures, political actions, and visual cues, such as clothing and other objects."[1] Undoubtedly, the novel is one of the most obvious cultural forms that absorbed the melodramatic mode since fiction and drama are quite close art forms—"twin sisters in the family of Fiction", according to Wilkie Collins (xxxvii). Martin Meisel discusses the interplay between three

[1] Hadley 4. On the influence of the melodramatic mode on the other forms of nineteenth-century English culture, especially in relation to Dickens, see also Smith 9-45, and Vlock 8-55.

major art forms of the nineteenth century: painting, drama, and prose fiction. He also writes about the influence of drama on prose fiction he writes: "the nineteenth century revealed a powerful bent in whole classes of fiction to assimilate themselves with drama" (64).

While nineteenth-century novels generally rely on the melodramatic mode, however, they also often overtly express antitheatrical, anti-melodramatic sentiments. Jonas Barish shows that "a prejudice against the theater . . . goes as far in European history as the theater itself can be traced" (1). Moreover, several critics think that the realist fiction has special causes for antitheatricality: for instance, using Foucauldian terms, Joseph Litvak ascribes the antitheatrical tendency of the novels to the nineteenth-century shift from "a society of spectacle" to "a society of surveillance" (ix),[2] while J. Jeffrey Franklin sees "a quite material contest for entertainment market share" between the two forms of entertainment: the theatre and the novel (83). These critics disclose the existence of "contradiction or tension between theatrical and antitheatrical pressures" in works of "psychological" novelists like Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Henry James (Litvak 110), but they exclude Dickens's novels from the ambivalence about the issue of theatricality on the ground that theatricality in his writing is too obvious.[3] It has recently been pointed out, however, that he is not wholly sympathetic towards theatre; for instance, John

---

[2] Litvak, however, problematizes such a simple dichotomy between "spectacle" and "surveillance" through his examinations of some of the nineteenth-century novels.

[3] Barish enlarges on the novels especially of Jane Austen and Thackeray, but he also excludes Dickens from the general antitheatrical tendency, considering him as all too sympathetic towards the theatre (Barish 299-310, 369-75).

Galvin contends that "Dickens both loathed and longed for the playhouse" (190). Agreeing that Dickens's attitude toward theatre includes elements of ambivalence rather than being simply admiring, I would argue that Dickens is no exception to the contradictory reactions to theatricality, and this will be shown through the examination of the external expressions of characters in *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Melodramatic Features of *Nicholas Nickleby*

Nicholas Nickleby, along with the immediately preceding novel, *Oliver Twist*, is counted, often pejoratively, among Dickens's most melodramatic novels on several accounts. General characteristics of melodrama apply to the main story of *Nickleby*: the clear moral distinction between good and evil; character stereotypes such as young handsome heroes, beautiful chaste heroines, out-and-out grim villains, half-comic villains, and comic men and women; and the final rewards for the virtuous characters and punishment for the villains. In addition, one can abundantly find other melodramatic features such as monologues, eavesdropping by comic characters, and quick successions of appearances and disappearances of characters. [4] These features are particularly concerned with the main story which provides a melodramatic framework around the principal characters like Nicholas, Kate, Smike, and Ralph.

Despite this general framework, this novel, like Dickens's other early comic novels, has plenty of digressions. It has, for instance, a few interpolated

---

[4] On general features of melodrama, see Booth *English Melodrama* 13-40; Heilman 74-87; Worth 1-16.

short tales though not so many as those of *The Pickwick Papers*. Besides, on the two occasions that Nicholas is obliged to leave London due to his uncle's vicious designs, the episodes that show how he spends the time are almost unrelated with the melodramatic framework. On the first occasion, he goes to the Yorkshire school as an assistant master to witness the cruel maltreatment of students there; one can say that this part of the novel has the serious purpose of social criticism denouncing the habitual abuses of children at provincial schools. Leaving London for the second time, he joins a company of itinerant actors, and succeeds as a leading actor. The scenes that comically depict Nicholas's life with the professional actors seem to be almost completely isolated from the main story.

The apparently divergent structure is not necessarily at odds with the melodramatic mode. As melodrama consists of the incongruous juxtaposition of the tragic and the comic like "streak bacons," the insertion of the comical episodes into the serious main story that for the most part deals with predicaments of the virtuous hero and heroine is within the boundary of generic expectations. In addition, the serious social criticism explicit in Yorkshire episodes is highly melodramatic. Robert Bechtold Heilman points out that "in literature, melodrama is the principal vehicle of protest and dissent" (96); the melodramatic mode is appropriate for social criticism as a means of evoking anger, with its clear moral distinction between virtue and vice. The protest against the contemporary state of provincial schools expressed in Dickens's descriptions of the abused students in Dotheboys Hall is, on the whole, intensely emotional and almost exaggerating, that is, very melodramatic:

But the pupils—the young noblemen! How the last faint traces of hope, the remotest glimmering of any good to be derived from his efforts in this den, faded from the mind of Nicholas as he looked in dismay around! Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; there were vicious-faced boys, brooding, with leaden eyes, like malefactors in jail; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping even for the mercenary nurses they had known, and lonesome even in their loneliness. With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding here! (82-83)

This description contains most of the characteristic features that Elaine Hadley finds both in the stage melodrama and the "anti-Poor Law literature" including Dickens's *Oliver Twist*: "graphic depictions of gruesome incidents, scenes of physical danger and inflicted torture, plots premised on criminal behavior, affected verbalizations of overwrought emotion, an aura of atmospheric menace, and narratives of familial and social danger" (78).

Despite such evident melodramatic features, the novel is not free from hostility to theatricality. For instance, Dickens reveals that he has some share of the antipathy to the contemporary theatre in the conversation between Nicholas and the "literary gentleman," in which Nicholas bitterly denounces plagiarism by the playwright (727-28).[5] In this case, for all his sympathetic attitudes toward the theatre, Dickens betrays a degree of displeasure at the lack of moral sensibility of those who were engaged in theatre, their loose morals being one of the main claims of the contemporary antitheatricalism. However, antitheatrical attitude of the novel is not limited to such a materialistic and personal issue as copyright; as we will see, this book is immersed in antitheatrical sentiments which are directly or indirectly expressed in the text.

The Crummles Episodes and Antitheatricality

Concerning the melodramatic in *Nicholas Nickleby*, it is remarkable that the novel depicts lives of professional actors in the parts dealing with Crummles and his troupe. The actors Nicholas meets in these parts ostentatiously resort

[5] All references to *Nicholas Nickleby* are to the Penguin edition.

to the melodramatic mode in their external appearances, costumes, speeches, and gestures, and through the comic description of their theatrical behaviours, the antitheatrical sentiments of the book are clearly demonstrated. It is often pointed out that the Crummles episodes are completely isolated from the other parts of the novel.[6] Certainly, the formal isolation is confirmed by the fact that few of the characters who take part in the Crummles episodes appear in the main plot except Miss Petowker and Mr Lillyvick, and Nicholas and Smike bring to the main plot hardly any of their experiences in the Crummles company. It is not strictly right, however, to conclude that the Crummles episodes have nothing to do with the main plot. Recognizing a "cheap melodrama" in *Nickleby*, J. Hillis Miller argues: "The scenes of provincial theater . . . act as a parody of the main plot, and of the life of chief characters in the main story" (*Charles Dickens* 90). If the Crummles episodes are considered "as a parody of the main plot," it follows that the two worlds, the protagonists' and the actors', are felt to have some connection even though it may be an implicit one.

In his view of the Crummles parts as parody, Miller talks about two aspects of melodrama, plot and characterization, but as far as parodic functions are concerned, what is at issue is surely characterization, since the Crummles episodes form hardly any plot to speak of; the extravagant theatricality of the actors is far more conspicuous than the thematic or

---

[6] For instance, Paul Schlicke writes: "In the plot of *Nickleby*, the players are distinctly isolated from most of the other characters" (*Dickens* 68).

structural aspects of the Crummles parts.[7] If considered exclusively in terms of characterization, Miller's comment would mean: the comic rendering of the theatrical or melodramatic aspects of the actors' speech and gestures serves as a kind of criticism of the genre of melodrama, and, indirectly, ridicules the main characters, who are in fact not far from comic actors as their language and gestures are stereotypical, and excessive, with no ambiguity about their moral position. Linda Hutcheon argues that parody contains "ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (6), but parodic elements in the Crummles troupe more or less serve as sarcasm about the protagonists' melodramatic lives. As we shall see, they really operate to degrade the melodramatic expressions of the main characters in the central story. However, this is no more than one side of the complex relationship between the world of the Crummles troupe and that of Nicholas, Kate, and Ralph. A close reading of the novel will reveal that the relationship is not so simple; it should be called interactive as the two apparently unrelated worlds criticize, deny, and fortify each other on the very issue of melodramatic self-expressions.

---

[7] Sylvia Manning complicates the matter by providing four terms for the parody that works in the Crummles episodes: "(1) the melodramatic actions and speech of Nicholas and Kate; (2) the melodramas enacted by the Crummles troupe; (3) the melodramas enacted by the Crummles troupe off-stage—the Crummles life, so to speak; and (4) the real melodramas of the English theatre that the Crummles productions reference" (84). I do not deal with the second term, because as far as the theatrical expressions are concerned, the second and third can be regarded as the same. Tore Rem includes the aspects of the plot in his elaborate, and a little forced, descriptions of features of the Crummles episodes which, he thinks, parody other parts of the novel (267-85).

George J. Worth observes that, in *Nickleby*, Dickens "often uses theatrical elements for comic purpose" (55). In fact, the novel's comic effect to a large extent draws on the presentation of stagy speeches and gestures. Typical of the comic rendering of theatricality are the melodramatic self-expressions of Crummles and his troupe, who continue their stilted performance even in real life. For instance, the manner that Mr and Mrs Crummles put on in walking home from the theatre shows their inflated acting off stage:

> Mrs Crummles trod the pavement as if she were going to immediate execution with an animating consciousness of innocence and that heroic fortitude which virtue alone inspires. Mr Crummles, on the other hand, assumed the look and gait of a hardened despot . . . . (371)

When the actors excessively resort to the melodramatic mode of self-expression, the discrepancy between the melodramatic and the real is emphasized in a manner that makes the actors look ridiculous. Even if their melodramatic self-expressions serve as parody that implies comic degradation of the parodied protagonists, the most conspicuous target of derision is the actors' theatricality itself.

Despite his affectionate attitude towards the actors, Nicholas feels uneasy about his association with them. Paul Schlicke ascribes the hero's discomfort with the actors to his class consciousness and to the narrative necessities that require him to return to London (*Dickens* 81-83), but one should not ignore that it also reflects the authorial attitude which criticizes

the actors' melodramatic self-expressions in general. Such a scene as the Crummleses' ostentatious off-stage performance makes it clear that the actors' melodramatic, exaggerated language and gestures are presented in a way that secures a distance from them, the distance Nicholas shares with the narrator. Carol Hanbery MacKay is right to suggest that "Nicholas seems almost to approach identification with the narrator" in the Crummles episodes (153). The main reason for the tangible closeness between the hero and the narrator is that the former, substituting himself for the latter, provides the objective viewpoint that can reveal the ridiculousness of the actors. In these parts of the novel, the hero in the main takes a spectator's position as does the Dickensian narrator, who for the most part depicts the actors' lives ironically. Although several critics restrict the comic strength of the Crummles troupe to those parts where they are not entangled in the main plot,[8] the actors' episodes are never completely free from the novel's dominant moral order; the ironic perspective of the narrator or the hero, representative this order, nearly always keeps a critical distance from the actors' indulgence in melodramatic performance.

The often-cited passage of Crummles's leave-taking at Portsmouth illustrates the critical distance that the both the hero and the narrator keep from the actors' excessive off-stage performance.

> In fact, Mr Crummles, who could never lose any opportunity for professional display, had turned out for the express purpose of taking a public farewell of Nicholas; and to render it the more imposing, he was

[8] See, for instance, Ganz "*Nicholas Nickleby*" 134-36 and Musselwhite 186-87.

> now, to that young gentleman's most profound annoyance, inflicting upon him a rapid succession of stage embraces, which, as everybody knows, are performed by the embracer's laying his or her chin on the shoulder of the object of affection, and looking over it. This Mr Crummles did in the highest style of melodrama, pouring forth at the same time all the most dismal forms of farewell he could think of, out of the stock pieces. (478)

In this passage, as Nicholas's "annoyance" indicates, both the hero and the narrator stand aloof from the actor-manager who is willing to make a display of his melodramatic performances. Here Crummles's performance is obviously treated as absurd by the narrator. Even if the narrator is not so displeased by the actor as Nicholas is, it is no less true that he keeps distance from the actor's melodramatic performance by ridicule, if not by unease. Largely because the narrator's detachment from the actors is secured by the ironic perspective that can see them from the advantageous position outside the melodramatic, the Crummles parts become "the least melodramatic portion of *Nickleby*," as Schlicke sees it ("Crummles" 15).

False Appearance and Melodrama

The critical distance from the actors' melodramatic self-expressions more or less implies an attack on the falseness inherent in them, inimical to the order of the whole novel which upholds the sincere, "natural," manifestations of the inside. The Crummleses' assumed roles while they walk away from the

theatre, as we have seen, have nothing to do with the immediate situation or their social identities. As for Crummles's leave-taking at Portsmouth, his manifested sorrow is not necessarily at odds with his true feeling; and yet his melodramatic mode of expression is so excessive that his sorrow cannot be regarded as corresponding to his inner feeling. In both cases, the gap between the outer appearance and the inner self is emphasized to indicate falseness of the character concerned.

Turning to other parts of the novel, it is not difficult to find that many characters assume false appearance as persistently as the professional actors. Michael Slater rightly observes: "The Crummleses are only the most obvious actors in *Nickleby*. . . . Nearly everyone else in this crowded book is playing a role" (Introduction to *Nicholas Nickleby* 16). Except the melodramatic roles of the protagonists, whose straightforwardness is diametrically opposed to falsity, the roles that many characters try to perform are regarded as different from their inner existence. For instance, the Kenwigses profess love and respect for Mr Lillyvick in order to curry his favour and secure their portion of his property; similarly, Mr Mantalini performs a profitable role of doting husband. Their self-expressions are virtually equal to the actors' in their insincerity and excess, but one should not ignore the fact that their performances, unlike the actors', are inseparable from real life insofar as they actually deceive or intend to deceive someone. It is true, however, that falsity of their external appearance seems readily discernible to all but the deceived victims. Moreover, on occasions, the performers in real life cast off their false masks to betray themselves absurdly so that they attract the ridicule of the narrator and the reader in the same way that the actors do.

The actors' role-playing is not intended for deception, though tinged with selfish concern for commercial success. Similarly, pecuniary gain is not the sole motive in role-playing for many characters with false masks. Squeers, the most eminent hypocrite in the novel, pretends to be a good teacher for commercial purposes, but he seems to deceive himself more than anyone else:

> . . . Squeers covered his rascality, even at home, with a spice of his habitual deceit, as if he really had a notion of some day or other being able to take himself in, and persuade his own mind that he was a very good fellow. (150-51)

He performs a role of virtuous person not only for the mercenary motive but for the desire to project the ideal self. The projection of an ideal self is shared by many characters in the novel, as Angus Easson suggests (143-44): Mrs Wititterly behaves as if she belonged to the upper class; Mr Lillyvick appears to believe that he is a great figure; and Fanny Squeers looks upon herself as a heroine of romance. Far from versatile performers like the Crummles troupe, they are so deeply immersed in one particular role that, not quite conscious of their own performing, they become empty as the role deprives them of their substantial existence; in consequence, their existence lies only in their external appearance. Their self-contented role-playing is also presented ridiculously or hideously. Those real-life performers are, to one degree or another, denounced in the book through derision or repulsion.

Whether for mercenary motives like the Kenwigses and Mr Mantalini or by desire to project an ideal self-image like Mrs Wititterly and Fanny

Squeers, whether consciously or unconsciously, performers who assume a false appearance are basically to be condemned in this novel. In this respect, this novel partakes of the antitheatricality in nineteenth-century England: the realist novel, among others, associated theatricality with artificiality and falsity as opposed to authenticity and sincerity, in favour of the latter. Nina Auerbach writes: "Sincerity is sanctioned and [theatricality] is not sincere. . . . Reverent Victorians shunned theatricality as the ultimate, deceitful mobility. It connotates not only lies, but a fluidity of character that decomposes the uniform integrity of the self" (4).[9] According to this view, theatricality is dangerous when it encroaches on the private sphere, where it threatens to subvert the system of external signs that are supposed to correspond to the internal truth. Despite his love of the theatre, Dickens is also wary of theatricality, as can be seen in his critical stance on the issue of role-playing in *Nickleby*. Thus, the actors' melodramatic self-expressions, which serve as a comic epitome of theatricality that impinges on private life, are decidedly rejected in Crummles's second leave-taking to Nicholas—a scene where the actor-manager is, according to Margaret Ganz, thoroughly entangled in the main plot ("*Nicholas Nickleby*" 135):

> When [Nicholas] had said good-bye all around and came to Mr Crummles, he could not but mark the difference between their present separation and their parting at Portsmouth. Not a jot of his theatrical manner remained; he put out his hand with an air which, if he could

[9] On the moral dichotomy regarding theatricality in the nineteenth-century realist novel, see also Franklin 83.

> have summoned it at will, would have made him the best actor of his day in homely parts, and when Nicholas shook it with the warmth he honestly felt, appeared thoroughly melted. (730)

This is different from Crummles's earlier leave-taking at Portsmouth in that it has no "theatrical manner"; here, the melodramatic elements appear to be sweepingly dismissed by the outright denial.

However, it is important to note that theatricality is practically affirmed at two levels in the above quotation. First, the narrator's rejection of theatricality is expressed in no other than theatrical terms. Sanctioned as sincere, Crummles's non-melodramatic expressions "would have made the best in homely parts"; that is to say, while repudiating the melodramatic, the narrator draws on theatrical language and associates the expression of "sincere" feeling with a stage character type. This, I believe, manifests a peculiar tension between antitheatricalism and protheatricalism in the author. Second, the rejection of theatricality here functions as a strategy for authorizing and intensifying the emotion expressed here, which climactically—and melodramatically—ends with the external, ostentatious expression of his intense feeling. While Crummles's previous melodramatic expressions are taken as insincere on the very ground that they are expressed in a theatrical way, the narrator attempts to cleanse him of insincerity paradoxically by overtly negating the melodramatic, and in effect endorses intense emotions which melodrama in general aspires to express.

In this novel, which has many characters that assume false appearances, external self-expressions are likely to be unreliable, but the

author mainly resorts to external descriptions for personal characterization. The characterization of Squeers provides an example of the novel's tendency for externalization. Squeers is distinguished from other Dickens's hypocrites like Pecksniff in *Martin Chuzzlewit* or Chadband in *Bleak House* in that no one apparently believes him to be virtuous as he apparently pretends to be. Exposing the true nature, his external appearance clearly designates his moral character.

> The bland side of his face was much wrinkled and puckered up, which gave him a very sinister appearance, especially when he smiled, at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous. (90)

As for other villains in the novel, one will find that they usually deceive other people by performing some roles or other: calculating the amount of money he can get, Ralph can be fawning, cruel, or even merry, according to what sorts of people he is dealing with; Arthur Gride assumes a role of helpless victim in Ralph's presence; Sir Mulberry Hawk behaves quite gently in order to deceive Mrs Nickleby. Hawk's parasites, Pluck and Pyke, are acting more obviously in flattering Mrs Nickleby with "a theatrical air" (423). One can say that the false appearances that these villains assume are presented in a way that endorses the moral order established by antitheatricality. Nevertheless, unlike the self-deceivers such as Squeers and his daughter, the deceiving villains hardly take themselves in, fully conscious of the roles they are playing. Moreover, their externals presented to the reader expose their wickedness with excessive clarity—that is, very

melodramatically. They thus contribute to the operation and reinforcement of the melodramatic order that draws the sharp distinction between good and evil.

It is sometimes pointed out that Ralph Nickleby is exceptional to the melodrama of the novel, for, whereas most characters live merely on a surface without interiority of any significance, the villain shows a comparatively complex inner life. John Carey says that Ralph "cannot be entirely subsumed into melodrama," after admitting that he is "part of the melodrama" of *Nickleby*. He argues that Ralph is "relentlessly malicious," and "antagonistic" to the harmony that the whole book apparently praises ("Introduction" xxv-xxviii). Yet, these features are very characteristic of the villain of melodrama, especially of the "dark" villain (in contrast to the "white" one), who is "grim, determined, immensely evil." [10] The uneasiness Ralph occasionally feels about his niece, Kate, may seem to indicate that he has something besides malice, and therefore is too complex to be called a simple melodramatic villain since it reveals that he has a secret vulnerability to innocence or beauty hidden beneath his callous surface. However, such complexity is not necessarily at odds with melodrama; on the contrary, the manifestation of his secret feeling for his niece can be regarded as very melodramatic. When Kate asks him to rescue her from Sir Mulberry hawk, he

---

[10] Booth *English Melodrama* 18-20. Recently, Juliet John has attempted to establish more elaborate categories for the classification of melodramatic villains, according to subdivisions of melodrama: Gothic, Romantic, and Domestic, but she does not deal fully with the typical melodramatic villain Ralph, except that she seems to suggest that he belongs, along with Sir Mulberry Hawk, to dandy villains in Domestic melodramas (149).

becomes agitated: "Ralph Nickleby . . . staggered while he looked, and reeled back into his house, as a man who had seen a spirit from some world beyond the grave" (316). The reaction that Ralph shows to the virtuous heroine is in fact very melodramatic, though this might reveal his hidden self. The supernatural power of the pure heroine, which can affect even the cruelest villain, is typical of "moral occult," according to Peter Brooks, "the melodramatic mode" strives to articulate (4-5); that is, what is emphasized by Ralph's uneasiness is not so much the tension between his potential weakness and external rascality as the irresistible power of virtue that the innocent heroine represents. In this sense, the moral opposition in the melodrama of the novel is reinforced by the manifestation of his vulnerability. Furthermore, in light of the mode of expression, one will see that Ralph is presented taking a very melodramatic gesture, "staggering," and his hidden emotions are made manifest. It is very melodramatic that, too intense to be contained inside, the emotions expose themselves externally. Thus, one can see that his alleged inner depth is not necessarily beyond the melodrama of the novel, but manifested externally—melodramatically.[11] It is true that Ralph reveals a relatively complex psychology, but he for the most part remains within the frame of the melodrama, and especially his self-expressions conform to the melodramatic mode. Ralph is no less a villain representing the evil in the melodrama of the main story than Nicholas is its virtuous hero.

---

[11] Mary Saunders, in her examination of Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House* and floor scenes in Dickens, argues that the melodrama or "expressionism" is one of Dickens's techniques to represent inner lives of characters which otherwise would be secret even to the reader. The melodramatic, or "expressionistic" mode of presentation of Ralph too, I think, enables the "revelation of an innerness" (Saunders 77).

One can safely state that, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, the false appearance which belies an authentic inner self, however easily it may be seen through, bears a negative connotation, and that the actors' melodramatic self-expressions off the stage serve as comical representation of theatricality that threateningly pervades the whole novel. The melodramatic characterization of the protagonists and the role-playing by the performing characters are fundamentally different in terms of authenticity; for while role-playing presupposes the gap between inner and outer selves, the sincere melodramatic self-expressions of the protagonists are simply excessive without such a gap. It is necessary to notice that the implied criticism against the actors does not apply to the melodramatic speeches and gestures of the protagonists as far as authenticity of outward appearances is concerned, because the self-expressions of the heroes, heroines, and villains are unmistakably sincere when they are most melodramatic, that is, when they externally present their true nature. The attack on false externals functions to fortify the value of a genuine appearance, which is indicative of an authentic self of the characters in contrast to their false appearance. As Crummles's two leave-takings illustrate, the ridicule against the actors marginalizes and rejects their melodramatic expressions as deviation so that the simplistic, genuine characterization of the protagonists—which is paradoxically very melodramatic—can be accepted as a norm.

On the most obvious level, comical elements of the Crummles episodes serve as a criticism of the actors themselves, rather than of melodrama as a genre, or melodramatic characterization of the protagonists of the novel. In his examination of *Daniel Deronda*, J. Jeffrey Franklin suggests that this

novel "present[s] a heavily antitheatrical message while using some of the techniques of melodrama", and that "the theatrical figures function as the necessarily evil Other and scapegoat for the use of theatrical form—melodrama" (117, 120). Dickens's strategy in his rejection of the Crummleses seems not very far from George Eliot's in her overtly antitheatrical discourses in *Daniel Deronda*, though he may not be so seriously antagonistic toward the "scapegoated" figures. As we have seen, the essentially melodramatic aspects of the protagonists are obscured by the emphasis on the overt thetricality of the ridiculous actors, who are, along with the social false players, "scapegoated" in the novel's dominant antitheatricalism.

The Melodramatic Self-Expressions, the Crummles Troupe, and the Main Characters

However, the Crummles episodes do not simply play a subordinate role, but often clash wit the main plot on equal terms. It cannot be denied, as J. Hillis Miller argues, that the melodramatic self-expressions of the professional actors function as parody of the main plot and criticize it. The actors' performances mock the external expressions like speeches and gestures of the main characters such as Nicholas, Kate, Smike, and Ralph, who seriously perform their respective roles with manners that clarify, to an excessive extent, their positions in the moral configuration of the novel through melodramatic self-expressions; as a result, the main plot is devalued by the actors' ludicrous performances. This parodic function of the Crummles is not

always implicit; in some cases, the actors directly articulate the similarities between their own melodramatic self-expressions and those of the main characters. In spite of the formal separateness, the Crummles episodes are contiguous to the main plot in that two main characters, Nicholas and Smike, physically enter the Crummles world. This contact occasions confrontation of the two incompatible views of melodrama, where the worldview of the actors threatens to devalorize the characterization of the protagonists. Consequently, the melodramatic self-expressions of the actors not only degrade melodrama as a genre, but directly subvert the central order of the novel mainly represented in the melodramatic mode.

Smike is presented as a helpless victim who is to provoke pity in the melodrama of the main plot, but Crummles interprets his pitiful appearance from another perspective, and judges it in theatrical terms:

> " . . . –what a capital countenance your friend has got!"
>
> "Poor fellow!" said Nicholas, with a half smile, "I wish it were a little more plump and less haggard."
>
> "Plump!" exclaimed the manager, quite horrified, "you'd spoil it for ever. . . . Why, as he is now, . . . he'd make such an actor for the starved business as was never seen in this country. . . ." (356)

Similarly, Crummles judges Nicholas's external appearance from the professional point of view when Nicholas, after reading the letter from Newman Noggs which reminds him of his role in the main plot, voices his abrupt decision to leave the company in a very melodramatic manner:

> "I couldn't stop if it were to prolong my life a score of years," rejoined Nicholas. "Here, take my hand, and with it my hearty thanks.—Oh! that I should have been fooling here."
>
> Accompanying these words with an impatient stamp upon the ground, he tore himself from the manager's detaining grasp, and darting rapidly down the street was out of sight in an instant.
>
> "Dear me, dear me," said Mr Crummles, looking wistfully towards the point at which he had just disappeared; "if he only acted like that, what a deal of money he'd draw! . . ." (477)

It is not unusual that Nicholas speaks in such exaggerated language and acts so demonstratively throughout the book, but whereas no viewpoints are present in the main plot that would see the hero as theatrical, the above quotation provides an alternative perspective to judge the hero's expressions in critical terms of melodrama by placing the professional actor-manager as an audience within the text. The debasement of the outward appearance of Nicholas and Smike down to the plane of the stage performance suggests that the Crummles world no longer serves to fortify the order of the main plot, but discordantly clashes with it over the issue of the melodramatic externals of the main characters. On the one hand, the Crummles episodes in which the professional actors are obsessed with melodramatic self-expressions imply a criticism of the melodramatic from the perspective of the narrator or the hero, and on the other hand, the main plot is so thoroughly immersed in the melodramatic mode that it cannot hold a privileged viewpoint from outside;

therefore, the two worlds are essentially incompatible in their perspectives concerning melodrama. Litvak is mainly right in asserting that "*two* distinct and incommensurable stages" in this novel are prevented "from overlapping with, and consequently from having much of an effect upon, each other" in *Nickleby* (116); but the separation between the two kinds of stages, the melodrama of the main story and the theatrical life of the actors, is not so absolute as Litvak suggests, for the safe distance between the two worlds is violated by Crummles's comment on the melodramatic aspects of the main characters as it foregrounds the potential resemblance between the two worlds. The stability of the melodramatic order of the main plot depends on the diversion of attention from its theatricality, but Dickens exposes the melodramatic of the main plot in moments of confrontation between the two worldviews, by having the actor reveal that the protagonists actually rely on the melodramatic self-expressions that the actors adopt both on and off the stage.

Dickens's representation of theatricality in *Nickleby* is thus complex: on the one hand, he appears to conform to the antitheatricality dominant in the nineteenth-century realist novel through his overt attack on the melodramatic self-expressions; on the other hand, he draws the reader's attention to the very theatricality of the main plot. In this respect, he is different from plainly antitheatrical novelists who do not have a perspective that can see the melodramatic from the inside. As for Dickens, however, he is so familiar with the theatre that his multilateral approaches have ways to expose the theatricality that his novel implicitly yet virtually relies on, while apparently repudiating it.

The novel's overt attack on the melodramatic self-expressions is contradicted on another dimension. As I have argued, the desire to assume another personality tends to be criticized in this novel and this desire not only obsesses the professional actors who perform roles in an unrestrained manner, but permeates the novel as a whole. Miss La Creevy, a miniature artist, makes her living on such a desire. When Kate finds numerous portraits of military figures in her room, the artist says: "Character portraits, oh yes—they're not real military men, you know. . . . of course not; only clerks and that, who hire a uniform coat to be painted in and send it here in a carped bag. . . ." (180). Her understanding of their "desperate need to create themselves" is, as Steven Marcus says, a manifestation of her "open, sympathetic" nature, which is overtly authenticated in the main plot.[12] According to Michael Booth, melodrama is essentially escapist, and at the bottom of its enormous popularity, the Victorian audience sought for the ideal dream world better than the harsh, real one in which the distinction between good and evil was by no means clear (Booth *English Melodrama* 187-88). The desire to be a different person was shared by those who supported the popularity of melodrama, and probably by the readers of the melodramatic novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*. In the midst of the dominant antitheatricality of the main story, Miss La Creevy, one of the obviously sympathetic characters in the novel, reveals a clear understanding of such an escapist desire.

---

[12] Marcus *Dickens* 114-15. Marcus sees that Miss La Creevy's sympathy for "solitude and deprivation" enables her to "treat Smike with tact" (115). Smike's comfort with her company unambiguously positions her on the "good" pole of the moral opposition in the melodrama of the main plot.

Despite the critical distance that he usually keeps from the actors, Nicholas reconciles himself to the melodramatic self-expressions at some points of the novel. One of the actors, Lenville, jealous of Nicholas's success in the theatre, publicly challenges him, and his challenge is carried out very melodramatically: "Object of my scorn and hatred! . . . I hold ye in contempt." To this, Nicholas responds with laughter rather than anger "in very unexpected enjoyment of this performance" (458). Nicholas's enjoyment may suggest his own access to melodramatic self-expressions; still, his laughter here implies some condescending distance from them. He can be taken to embody the worldview of the main plot of the novel, keeping some critical distance from the actors to maintain the superiority of the "serious" world of the protagonists over that of the actors', the superiority that both the hero and the narrator normally assume. Immediately after, however, Nicholas plunges himself into the carnivalesque play of the melodramatic self-expressions. In the end, Nicholas strikes down Lenville, and makes the following speech and gestures:

> " . . . Be careful, sir, to what lengths your jealousy carries you another time; and be careful, also, before you venture too far, to ascertain your rival's temper." With this parting advice Nicholas picked up Mr Lenville's ash stick which had flown out of his hand, and breaking it in half, threw him the pieces and withdrew, bowing slightly to the spectators as he walked out. (459)

Nicholas's parting bow obviously belongs to the professional performers who

are conscious of audience; having already established himself as an actor on the stage, he does not look on the off-stage performance from the critical distance in this scene, but actively participates, indulging in melodramatic self-expressions. Inevitably entailing the gap between the inside and the outside, his self-conscious performance indicates that he enjoys melodramatic self-expressions in the same way as the actors. By Nicholas's willful involvement, the melodramatic self-expressions temporarily cease to be a target of ridicule, and the desire to enjoy the melodrama both as actors and audience is authenticated in the novel's dominant voice.

The Melodramatic in Nicholas's and Crummles's Worlds

As we have seen, the world of the novel around Nicholas and Ralph and that of Crummles and his troupe are related in complex ways on the issue of melodrama. On the one hand, in the Crummles world, melodrama is concerned with individual self-expressions, mainly serving as an object of ridicule to be marginalized in the dominant order of the book represented by the narrator's and the hero's voices. The world of the protagonists is, on the other hand, so thoroughly pervaded with the melodramatic mode that one cannot hold the privileged position of viewing melodrama from an objective distance, the distance that is paradoxically provided by the conscious melodramatic actors. Thus, the two worlds are kept in a state of tension, concerning the common factor, melodrama.

Dickens's familiarity with the melodramatic mode, which is far greater than other contemporary realist novelists', does not result in simple pro- or anti-theatricalism in his work. Litvak points out that theatricality is

overdetermined (xi-xii), and Juliet John demonstrates not only that Dickens's view on melodrama is ambivalent, but that the genre of melodrama itself innately contains contradictions (70-92). One could say that the multiplicity and ambivalence inherent in melodrama influences Dickens in a way that distinguishes him from other novelists who are not so deeply involved in the theatre. Precisely because he is steeped in manifold aspects of melodrama, his works reveal his complex relationship with it, and *Nicholas Nickleby*, the most melodramatic of his novels, illustrates his peculiar approach to the issue of melodrama.

Dickens never gives up the melodramatic mode in his writing career, and both his early and late novels have characteristic features of melodrama in abundance. However, no other novels deal with theatricality so plainly as *Nickleby*, with a possible exception of *Great Expectations*. In this late mature novel, Dickens thematically and in a more refined way presents theatricality in the senses of role-playing in real life and the split between the external appearance and the inner self. Like Crummles and his troupe in *Nickleby*, Wopsle comically shows theatrical performances which seem to parody the real-life performers. His hopeless acting of Hamlet obviously mirrors Pip's own hopeless role-playing based on the vain expectations, as is suggested by his own dream in the night after seeing Wopsle's Hamlet; in the dream, the hero has to "play Hamlet to Miss Havisham's Ghost, before twenty thousand people, without knowing twenty words of it" (230). In this light, Wopsle's ridiculous theatricality is well incorporated into the thematic framework of the whole novel.

Unlike Wopsle, Crummleses' actors are comparatively liberated from

the thematic concern, and, even though temporarily, they subvert the central order of *Nickleby* itself by problematizing the melodramatic mode that it fundamentally relies on. The popular entertainment occupies so great a part of the author that he cannot wholly subordinate the performers to the general concern. Crummles's world thus clashes with the central one on a few occasions, claiming its own hilarity in a comically theatrical manner, which Wopsle cannot hope to do.

Chapter 3

The Old Curiosity Shop: The Gothic, the Grotesque, and the Comic

It is generally agreed that Dickens is a grotesque writer, although critics do not always agree on the definition of the term, "grotesque."[1] Dickens himself was conscious of its importance in relation to his creations; he wrote to John Forster that "the grotesque, tragicomic conception" was central to the composition of *Great Expectations*.[2] The "tragicomic" seems one of the main features of Dickens's grotesque art; Michael Goldberg finds in Dickens's and Carlyle's grotesque writings, "their sense of a world as simultaneously a hugely comic and tragic creation" (189). However, the tragicomic does not sufficiently explain Dickens's grotesque art. Critics who deplore the grotesque features in his writings associate the term with his propensity for extravagance and exaggeration, and his unrealistic imagination.[3] Despite the critical disparagement, these characteristics are indispensable for Dickens's art, and have been paid great attention to by those who are more seriously

---

[1] In his study of the grotesque in Dickens, Michael Hollington declares: "To write about Dickens and the Grotesque is to approach a quite central feature of the novelist's art, one that has been recognised and commented upon, admiringly or disparagingly, by almost every critic who ever wrote on Dickens" (*Dickens* 1).

[2] Quoted in Forster II: 285.

[3] On critics' attack on the grotesque in Dickens, see Hollington "Dickens's" 91-92.

concerned about the grotesque in his writing. For instance, adopting Wolfgang Kayser's conception, Andrea Gilchrist defines the term in relation to Dickens's writings: "The grotesque world . . . is a realm from which we are estranged" (75).[4]

Both of the above features of the grotesque, the "tragicomic" and the "estranged," have an ambivalent nature with a combination of seemingly incongruous elements: tragic and comic; real and unreal. Dickens himself is deeply attracted to grotesque people and objects. He also has a peculiar perception that detects the grotesque in the ordinary; in his eye, everyday realities transform themselves and oscillating between reality and fancy. These two approaches sometimes collide with each other; while he tends to detect personal and social evils or at least some unfavourable aspects in the grotesque forms that he recognizes in the everyday life, such moral connotations are often subverted by his fascination with the grotesque. For instance, the abnormal appearance of Mrs Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit* implies her inhuman cruelty, but, at the same time, Dickens's indulgence in her grotesqueness makes her one of the most attractive characters. One can say that such contradictory attitudes of fascination and repulsion come from the ambivalence inherent in grotesque art in general.

In the consideration of the grotesque in Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* is a very important work; the author himself asserts in one of the prefaces to it that grotesque elements are of central significance in this novel:

---

[4] Kayser regards the first feature of the grotesque as "the estranged world" which is, unlike "the world of the fairy tale," created by sudden transformation from the real world (184-85).

" . . . in writing the book, I had it always in my fancy to surround the lonely figure of the child with grotesque and wild, but not impossible, companions, and to gather about her innocent face and pure intentions, associates as strange and uncongenial as the grim objects that are about her bed when her history is first foreshadowed." (xli).[5] These words are echoed in the text by Master Humphrey, the original narrator of the novel: "It would be a curious speculation . . . to imagine her future life, holding her solitary way among a crowd of wild grotesque companions; the only pure, fresh, youthful object in the throng" (16). As if to realize his "curious speculation", Nell wanders among people and objects utterly foreign to her in the course of the story. John Forster observes:

> The hideous lumber and rottenness that surround the child in her grandfather's home, take shape again in Quilp and his filthy gang. In the first still picture of Nell's innocence in the midst of strange and alien forms, we have the forecast of her after-wanderings, her patient miseries, her sad maturity of experience before its time. (124-25)

The grotesque in Dickens's writings is in fact far more complex than the simple function of forming a contrast to the purity of the heroine, mainly for two reasons. First, this aesthetic conception itself is inherently ambivalent, including contradictory elements in it; second, Dickens is so deeply involved with the grotesque that he does not give it such a uniform function as Forster suggests, but presents it in multiple contexts with a variety of effects.

---

[5] All quotations of *The Old Curiosity Shop* are from the Everyman Dickens edition.

Dickens shares grotesque art with the contemporary popular entertainment, and one of its most conspicuous aspects is the juxtapositions of miscellaneous, often conflicting elements.[6] Like the Regency pantomime filled with transformations, and others of Dickens's early comic novels, *The Old Curiosity Shop* is remarkably heterogeneous, dividing itself in several seemingly unrelated parts. The coexistence of incongruities—grotesque in itself—makes the grotesque motif of the novel all the more variegated as it is dealt with by diverse realms in their respective ways.

The primary concern of this chapter is to show the complexity of the grotesque elements represented in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Through the examination of the grotesque elements, with a passing reference to the related concept, the gothic, I will attempt to clarify how Dickens's grotesque art works in this novel.

The Grotesque People and Objects Surrounding Nell

At one point in the novel, the image of Nell surrounded by the grotesque is presented in a manner suggesting that she cannot escape from the grotesque wherever she goes. Wandering about the town where Mrs Jarley is to give the waxwork show, Nell is attracted to an old gateway. She speculates on the old building with morbid fancy, until she thinks of "murders," and then, her speculation is interrupted by the sudden appearance of Quilp as if her nightmarish fancy has materialized in the form of the most grotesque character in the novel:

---

[6] See Introduction above.

> There was an empty niche from which some old statue had fallen or been carried away hundreds of years ago, and she was thinking what strange people it must have looked down upon when it stood there, and how many hard struggles might have taken place, and how many murders might have been done, upon that silent spot, when there suddenly emerged from the black shade of the arch, a man. The instant he appeared, she recognised him—Who could have failed to recognise, in that instant, the ugly mis-shapen Quilp! (213)

Here a grotesque character and an ancient building are connected to show that the settings and figures in the text merge in their grotesqueness and become alien and threatening to the child heroine.

The significance of the scene is also confirmed by Hablôt K. Browne's illustration. Four illustrators contribute to the novel, and each of them plays an important role in respect to the grotesque in the book, though their contributions vary widely in quantity.[7] The plate, "Quilp at the gateway" (214), executed by Browne, has two statues of sinister animal figures on the gateway, which are visually linked with Quilp: the dwarf blandishes his stick and in a similar manner each of the monster statues bears a flag. Nell's crouching posture and scared expression strengthen the effect of horror. The combined effect heightens the impression that Nell cannot escape from the

---

[7] Out of seventy-five plates, Samuel Williams and Daniel Maclise give only one each, whereas Hablôt K. Browne and George Cattermole contribute respectively fifty-nine and fourteen plates; see Appendix J of the Clarendon edition of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (624-29).

alien surroundings as if they were in conspiracy against her.[8]

For Nell, however, the significance of the Gothic buildings is differentiated from that of other grotesque elements. The ancient buildings carry multiple connotations in relation to the past and death, and the grotesque in this novel. It is worth examining the significance of the Gothic buildings here to elucidate the relationship between Nell and the grotesque.

Contemporary Sentiments about the Gothic

In the mid-nineteenth century, there were varied views about Gothic architecture in accordance with different views about the Middle Ages. According to Robin Gilmour, "No period was used so promiscuously and unhistorically in the nineteenth century as the Middle Ages" (45). The most conspicuous of the nineteenth-century sentiments towards the Gothic was the Victorian Gothic Revival, represented by A. W. N. Pugin, whose highly influential work, *Contrasts, or a Parallel between the Architecture of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Days*, was published four years before *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Pugin's advocacy of the Gothic architectural style had an ethical connotation. In this period, "past and present were in opposition and the Middle Ages were used . . . as a weapon against the mechanism, calculation, selfishness, and ugliness of the emerging industrial civilisation."[9] As a convert to Catholic, Pugin stressed the Catholicism of the Middle Ages, but the Gothic style was

---

[8] Q. D. Leavis aptly observes that this plate shows Browne's comprehension of the whole novel (444-45).

[9] Gilmour 47.

espoused not only by Catholics but by High Church Anglicans; in addition to this, the Cambridge Camden Society started as an academic antiquarian society, and in the political domain, young Tories were enthusiastic for the Gothic. Behind their advocacy of the Gothic lay discontent with modern civilization, fervent aspiration for social reform, and yearnings for the social harmony and moral integrity of medieval feudalism.

The orientation towards the past was in some way shared by the earlier Revivalists like Horace Walpole. The earlier phase of the Gothic Revival in Britain, which Kenneth Clark calls "the Picturesque period" (105), was less theoretical, less religious, and less political. The earlier Revivalists, against whom Pugin in part reacted, were not attracted to Gothic architecture in ethical terms. Before the Victorian Revival, as Ian Duncan sees it, "Gothic" had no definite connotations but merely suggested "a past that was other and strange" (21). According to Paul Frankl, for earlier Gothicists,

> Gothic was, rather, a kind of movable scenery to the poetry of their day, which, in order to be properly poetic, sought refuge in a world of dreams, in the uncertainties of legend . . . in the rural scene that brought forgetfulness of the clamor of the world and the disappointments of life . . . or in the nocturnal land of faerie. Gothic buildings were appropriate to this atmosphere as witnesses of the past, and ruins as uncanny, gloomy reminders of the transitoriness of all things.[10]

[10] Frankl 380.

The early Gothicists had a dual approach towards the past. On the one hand, the past was not clearly identified as the Middle Ages when they indulged in melancholic thoughts, contemplating transitoriness suggested by Gothic ruins: the past was not necessarily specific insofar as ruins were reminiscent of the passage of time. On the other hand, the past was associated with romantic idealization of chivalry. The idealization of the medieval chivalry of the earlier Revivalists was different from that of the new Revivalists in that the idealized past did not serve as a model for reform, but rather brought up an image of "a new world of heroes, reckless, bloodthirsty, and obscure."[11] Although the new Revivalists were in fact unrealistic in their idealization of the Middle Ages, the older sentiments about the Gothic were more markedly impractical and fanciful.

As Gothic architecture often evoked a fantastic version of the past, its strangeness went on further and approached monstrosity and grotesqueness. John Ruskin, one of the most influential writers on the Gothic, regarded the Grotesque as one of the essential elements of Gothic architecture (X: 184, 239). It is quite likely that the strange appearance of Gothic architecture, together with the association with the fantastic past, awakened thoughts of the preternatural. Rodney Stenning Edgecombe takes the "energetic grotesquery" and the "idealism of chivalric romance" as the two extremes that underlay the Gothic Revival, and argues that Dickens almost exclusively appreciated the former (4). The two terms Edgecombe offers are not so clearly opposing as he thinks because the romantic view of the past is not easily separable from the grotesque, but his formulation has some truth in it; Dickens was attracted to

[11] Clark 36.

the grotesque features in Gothic architecture, which undoubtedly excited his wild imagination, though some traces of idealism also can be found in his writings.

Unlike the Revivalists, Dickens does not have a definite taste for the Gothic, and, therefore, his view on this matter is not coherent. However, when he depicts Gothic buildings, he is inevitably involved in the assortment of sentiments of the mid-nineteenth century about the Gothic.[12] In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, varied views about the Gothic, and about the past and death, are presented around the old buildings

The Gothic Buildings, the Curiosity Shop, and the Grotesque

Nancy K. Hill is one of the few critics who have paid serious attention to the Gothic buildings in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, but her argument that the ruined condition of the Gothic architecture in the novel is suggestive of "a nation whose spiritual life is in disarray" (99-100) seems to miss the point. It is true that the novel shares to some extent with Victorian Gothic Revivalists the dissatisfaction with modern industrialized society. Nell and her grandfather begin their journey in order to escape from urban life, the economic system of which has led them to destruction. The scenes that they go through before they are "clear of London" (125) visually function as an accusation against the present social situation by depicting squalid conditions of the poor and by implying indifference on the part of the wealthy. In contrast, the countryside

[12] Joseph H. Gardner argues that Dickens even felt aversions to the Victorian Gothic Revival, though it is still likely that the movements influenced him especially through Caryle (83).

appears to be untouched by the urban squalor. In this sense, this novel reflects the general advocacy of the social reform of the new Revivalists. Nevertheless, in his accusation of the present society, the author does not idealize the past in their manner. Having little illusion about the Middle Ages, Dickens does not take a specific time in the past as a model for a better society, and it is improbable that the ruined condition of the Gothic buildings in this book corresponds to a spiritual, moral decay of the contemporary society as Hill argues.

Sue Zemka's comment on the Gothic architecture in this novel is more persuasive: according to her, the "aesthetic appeal" of the Gothic buildings is "intrinsically and irreversibly one of decay, ruin, and decomposition" (302). Nell's escapist movement from the city to the country is closer to the sentiments of the earlier, romantic Revivalists: what Nell and her grandfather seek as an alternative to the modern life is akin to the vague past that attracted the earlier Revivalists.

The decaying buildings remind Nell neither of a specific time in the past nor of transitoriness, but make her think of eternity: "The child looked around her with that solemn feeling with which we contemplate the work of ages that have become but drops of water in the great ocean of eternity" (400). Chris Brooks finds that, in this novel, a double time scale is at work: "purely human" and "transcendental" (24). The view of the past that Nell forms in relation to the ruined architecture belongs to the transcendental view of time, and in this respect, it is more radical than any ideas of the past offered by other characters. The bachelor, whose teachings encourage Nell's affection for the old buildings, has a peculiar view of the past concerning the ancient tombs of

the village; he stubbornly rejects insipid facts about the tombs in favour of fabricated, romantic stories. Although the past he romanticizes does not exactly coincide with the age of chivalry, his view is similar to that of the earlier Revivalists in that he idealizes the past in order to make it more pleasant to the living. Nell is even less concerned with particularities of past events. She generalizes the bachelor's stories and regards the churchyard as "another world, where sin and sorrow never came; a tranquil place of rest, where nothing evil entered" (416). In fact, the bachelor's stories contain some fearful aspects, such as a baron "ravaging, with cut, and thrust, and plunder, in foreign land" and a lady "hanged and drawn and quartered" (415), but for Nell, each story is no more than a part of eternity, with so little significance in itself that it is totally purged of any possibilities of aggression.

The ruins remind Nell of eternity in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, they are close to eternity because they have lived long as witness of the changes of the times; "Foliage carved in the stone, and emulating the mastery of Nature's hand, yet remained to tell how many times the leaves outside had come and gone while it lived on unchanged" (400). On the other hand, their crumbling state is a manifestation of the process of change, as they are "fast hastening to decay" (363), so that the transcendental time is suggested by contrast. In other words, the ancient buildings are at once part of and extraneous to eternity. This paradox makes Nell's relationship with them rather ambiguous. While she reveres the ruins because they are part of eternity, she takes them as sad examples of the transitory movement of mortal life.

The ancient buildings are congenial to the idealized heroine. After Nell

settles in the final village, her main spheres of activity are confined to the ancient house, the old church, and the graveyard. Even before coming to this village, she often evinces her fascination with ancient buildings. Just before she glimpses the gruesome figure of Quilp at the Gothic gateway, she cannot resist approaching this place with "a mingled sensation of curiosity and fear" (214); after escaping from the immediate fear that her grandfather may steal from Mrs Jarley, she finds comfort in the ruined walls; she feels "curious kind of pleasure in lingering among these houses of the dead" (136).

The old, decaying buildings nevertheless function as a stark contrast with the young, beautiful heroine. The contrast between Nell and the grotesque people and objects is central to *The Old Curiosity Shop*, beginning with the picture of Nell sleeping surrounded by grotesque curios in the curiosity shop, and ending with the image of Nell dead in the old buildings. The allegorical significance of the first picture of Nell was pointed out soon after it was published.[13] The contrast between Nell and the grotesque people and objects—the old buildings included—continues till she dies.

In considering the grotesque aspects of the ancient buildings in the novel, it is worth examining the characteristics of the items in the grandfather's shop because they are the first among the grotesque objects

---

[13] Thomas Hood, one of the earliest readers of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, anonymously wrote a review in *The Athenaeum*, which much impressed Dickens: "we do not know where we have met, in fiction, with a more striking and picturesque combination of images than is presented by the simple, childish figure of Little Nelly, amidst a chaos of such obsolete, grotesque, old-world commodities as from the stock in trade of the Old Curiosity Shop. . . . it is like an Allegory of the peace and innocence of Childhood in the midst of Violence, Superstition, and all the hateful or hurtful Passions of the world" (887).

brought into contrast with Nell. Among miscellaneous objects are "suits of mail standing like ghosts in armour . . . , fantastic carvings brought from monkish cloisters, rusty weapons of various kinds, distorted figures in china and wood and iron and ivory; tapestry and strange furniture that might have been designed in dreams" (10). These items are separated from everyday life because they belong to the past on the one hand, and they are "fantastic" on the other. In this case, the past is treated as alien, unintelligible and fearful. Reflecting on the child and the old curiosity shop, Master Humphrey, the original narrator of the novel, gets the impression that the grotesque objects appear even to threaten Nell with their latent malice:

> the old murky rooms—the gaunt suits of mail with their ghostly silent air—the faces all awry, grinning from wood and stone—the dust and rust, and worm that lives in wood—and alone in the midst of this lumber and decay, and ugly age, the beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams. (19-20)

James R. Kincaid finds similarities between the curiosity shop and the ruined buildings of Nell's final retreat, arguing that Nell and her grandfather "really don't go anywhere" (87). The articles in the shop correspond to the objects in the ancient buildings of the village, which contain, for instance, "strange chairs, whose arms and legs looked as though they had dwindled away with age," and "effigies of warriors . . . girdled with their swords, and cased in armour as they had lived" (400, 412). The old sexton's side-job of making handicrafts from fragments of the ruins further confirms the close

connection between the shop and the ruins: "Some gentlefolks who are fond of ancient days, and what belongs to them . . . like to buy these keepsakes from our church and ruins" (411). Obviously, the sexton's commodities are of the sort that is sold in the curiosity shop. The shop and Nell's final home are connected by a taste for the Gothic, which was widespread at the time when the novel was written, and by commercial activities that depended on that taste. In addition, the grotesque appearance of Nell's grandfather is associated with ruins: "The haggard aspect of the little old man was wonderfully suited to the place; he might have groped among old churches and tombs and deserted houses and gathered all the spoils with his own hands" (10). The association between the grotesque people and objects on the one hand and the ancient buildings of her final retreat on the other suggests that the novel deals not only with the romantic side, but with another side of the Gothic, "energetic grotesquery."

Acknowledging the connection between the curiosity shop and the old church, John Forster says that the objects in the church are "stripped of strangeness" (I: 125). It is true that the curiosity shop seems far more grotesque than Nell's final retreat, but, strictly speaking, as long as the contrast between the heroine and the ancient buildings is at work, the ruins retain some degrees of strangeness. It is the absence of threatening aspects in the village that distinguishes it from the shop. As we have seen, the objects in the shop are apparently threatening to the vulnerable child, but she transcends earthly terrors before coming to the final village: she sleeps in the open "with no fear for herself, for she was past it now" (350). As she comes nearer to death, the potentially threatening surroundings imbue her with

"none of terror or alarm" (403). Arthur Clayborough finds "omission of the grotesque and the fantastic" in Dickens's "idealized scenes" (211). The incompatibility between the ideal and the grotesque is not restricted to the case of Dickens, but fundamental to grotesque art in general, for the grotesque is opposed to "all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract." [14] Nell's companionship with the ancient buildings in general, and in the deathbed scene in particular, tends to be so idealized that her surroundings seem not to admit of grotesque elements.

The absence of the grotesque in the village is manifest also in the illustrations. The objects around the child in "Nell in Bed" (15), the only plate designed by Samuel Williams, seem to follow the bizarre items scattered in the background of the first plate, "The shop" (2), given by George Cattermole, except that the background of Williams's plate looks more miscellaneous and more grotesque because sacred objects like a crucifix are mingled up with hideous faces of pagan statues. The most striking in Williams's is the contrast made by light and dark between Nell and the grotesque objects.

However, the contrast between Nell and her surroundings is not so distinct in later illustrations. Cattermole and Browne are the chief artists who contribute to the book. Of their respective roles, Jane R. Cohen says: "Dickens apportioned out the picturesque subjects to Cattermole, the grotesque to Hablôt K. Browne" (129); that is, Cattermole tends to be entrusted with the archaic settings around Nell, while Browne draws most of the characters in London, and especially Quilp. Both artists are really good at drawing Gothic architecture, but Cattermole shows "greater interest in

---

[14] Bakhtin 19.

structures than in human figures" whereas Browne is better at depicting human characters (Cohen 129). Actually, Cattermole's first illustration of the curiosity shop shows the figure of Nell rather devoid of animation in comparison with Williams's, and in the series of illustrations that present the old buildings of the village, human figures are inconspicuous except Nell lying dead. Seeing that Cattermole's almost exclusive interest in Gothic architecture is rather incongruous with Dickens's enthusiastic praise of the "beauty" of his illustrations, J. R. Harvey concludes: "the aesthetic qualities of gothic architecture could hardly have aroused such an intense response, and the deeply-felt beauty must rather inhere in the associations of reverence and sanctity that gather round ancient religious buildings" (119). Indeed, it is likely that the "associations of reverence and sanctity" are evoked by the antiquarian adherence to elaborate presentation of the old buildings and the relative insignificance of human figures in Cattermole's designs. The sacred atmosphere conveyed by his illustrations is quite relevant to solemnity dominating the old buildings of the village in Dickens's text. Nell is not in contrast with ancient buildings, but merged into the background. In this respect, it is curious that Dickens originally intended the plate of the old gateway to be designed by Cattermole,[15] for it is quite unlikely that he could have connected the potentially grotesque elements so skillfully as Browne; Cattermole's illustration, with less interest in grotesque human figures, would have failed to express the ominous connection of these grotesque elements.

---

[15] In his letter to Cattermole in August 1840, Dickens mentions "a subject of an old Gateway which I had put in expressly with a view to your illustrious pencil" (*Letters* II: 110)

It is nonetheless true that the close associations of the old buildings with death are potentially grotesque; for all the general sacredness attributed to them, the decaying settings reveal some grotesque aspects arising from their proximity to death. Those who frequent the ruins, such as the old sexton with a crutch and his friend, the deaf gravedigger, are ominous and even hideous in their physical and occupational closeness to death. The only illustration designed by Daniel Maclise represents Nell at the old well by the old sexton (426). The figure of the sexton in the plate—which Andrew Sanders regards as "the most sinister in the novel" (86)—ominously pointing downward into the well, is horrifying and even repugnant. The shade pervading the old man, the well, and the walls makes a strong contrast with the light shining on Nell. Her vision of death is utterly different from the physical decay suggested by the ominous figure of the sexton who represents downward movement with other objects in the illustration,[16] for death is not downward but upward for her.

The miscellaneous mourners at the burial service for Nell also reveal the grotesque latent in closeness to death. After mentioning various phases of life that gather around Nell's tomb, the narrator chooses to dwell on the aged who are shown in an ambivalent state between life and death.

> Old men were there, whose eyes were dim and senses failing—grandmothers, who might have died ten years ago, and still been old—the deaf, the blind, the lame, the palsied, the living dead in

[16] The downward movement of this illustration is analyzed in detail by J. R. Harvey (115-17).

> many shapes and forms, to see the closing of that early grave. What was the death it would shut in, to that which still could crawl and creep above it. (559)

The passing of time does not imbue the old people with solemnity which pervades the old buildings, but cruelly manifests their physical decay. Nell cannot be part of the mortal world with its physical mixture of death and life, because she is beyond it. The grotesque figures of the old age strengthen disparity between the transcendental state which Nell finally achieves and the physical world where death is a biological inevitability.

Even the ruined buildings to which Nell is irresistibly attracted bear ominous aspects. When Nell reaches the top of the tower through "the winding stair in darkness," a sudden light comes into sight with a scenery of idyllic beauty: "It was like passing from death to life" (414). One should note that, from Nell's viewpoint, the tower, part of the Gothic buildings of the village, is not an ultimate goal of her journey, but an inevitable gate to the world beyond, and that the darkness of the tower and the light of the natural scenery beyond are contrasted. The old well that I have referred to makes her think, "Spring! a beautiful and happy time!" (430), as if she has to find a relief from the thoughts of death associated with the well. At times she seems to expel the ruins from her idealized picture of afterlife: "Perhaps the mourners learn to look to the blue sky by day, and to the stars by night; and to think that the dead are there, and not in the grave" (419). In such cases, Nell's idealized picture seems to consist exclusively of beautiful scenery separated from the decaying ruins. This implies that even Nell perceives some ominous aspects of

the old buildings.

Nell's attitude towards the ruined buildings exemplifies her complicated relationship with the grotesque objects and people, the problematic nature of which is revealed by her peculiar communion with the decay they embody. Writing about the grotesque in *Dombey and Son*, Michael Steig points out that, while young Paul Dombey's childlike, innocent perception offers a perspective that detects grotesqueness in the adult world, he at the same time "approaches grotesqueness himself." Steig goes on to attribute the grotesque aspects of Paul to his "desire for death" ("Structure" 317-18). The case seems similar with Nell: while the grotesqueness of the world is revealed in contrast with her innocence and beauty, she is herself regarded as grotesque because of her closeness to death. Her peculiar status concerning the grotesque starts at the very first description of Nell surrounded by the grotesque objects. Paul Schlicke observes: "the shop setting is integral to her presence, and yet she is differentiated from it" (97). In the curiosity shop, she sometimes seems quite at home among the grotesque curios, though apparently making a stark contrast with them.

Her congeniality with the grotesque is clearly seen in her relationships with itinerant showfolks, who constitute the grotesque.[17] The first instance of popular entertainment in this novel is the puppet Punch. Quilp's close resemblance to Punch is often pointed out, and it is, as we shall see later, very important to the consideration of the comic aspects of the novel; but, as far as Nell is concerned, the significance of the resemblance virtually goes no further

[17] On the relationships between the grotesque and popular entertainment in this novel, see Hollington *Dickens* 89.

than the fact that she is destined to be surrounded by the grotesque wherever she goes. Her reaction to the puppets is quite different from the fear or repulsion she feels towards the grotesque dwarf, illustrating her peculiar position in the grotesque art of this novel. While her senile grandfather displays childish curiosity about the puppets of the itinerant puppeteers Codlin and Short, her first action in this scene is to offer her help in mending the puppets with neither curiosity nor terror; unlike her grandfather, she does not deal with the puppets in the capacity of spectator. It is significant that her commitment to the puppet show takes place in a graveyard, for this setting reveals the puppets' association with death. Off stage, Punch is deprived of the vitality that marks him in real performance, so that his lifelessness is foregrounded. Thus, her participation in the puppet show is as suggestive of death as are her associations with the ruined buildings.

Mrs Jarley's wax-works are similar to the ruins in that they stand on the borderline between life and death. The wax-works, with their "death-like faces" (226), are more markedly oscillating between life and death because their visual likeness to living people places them in a realm between humans and inanimate objects.[18] Nell's closeness or congeniality to the wax-works is perceived by other characters of the novel. Working for Mrs Jarley's wax-work show, Nell is not only recognized by Miss Monflathers as a "wax-work child" (244), but also supposed by children to be "an important item of the curiosities" (218). Mrs Jarley is shrewd enough to put the child to advertising

[18] John Carey includes wax-works in the images which "populate the border country between people and things, where Dickens' imagination is mostly engaged" (*Violent* 101).

purposes, and make her "the chief attraction" of the show (225). While Nell sleeps among the grotesque wax-works, she has "no cause of anxiety in connexion with the wax-work" (226). One may say that her unearthly existence makes her strangely congenial to these grotesque effigies.

Nell's Perception of the Grotesque Realities

For all the closeness of Nell to the grotesque, she recognizes a potential threat of the grotesque in her own perception. Before she sets off on her journey, the world outside the curiosity shop is no less grotesque to her than the curiosities inside. Probably influenced by Kayser's notion of the grotesque, Chris Brooks points out that, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, "[t]hings and people have become estranged, transmuted into the components of a world both continuous and discontinuous with our own" (26). The estranged, transmuted world is often created through Nell's perspective, as her vague fears are reflected on her vision of the external world. In such cases, the estranged world is threatening to the passive heroine. Her perception, transforming the ordinary objects into something grotesque, detects the horror latent in the external world, :

> There was a crooked stack of chimneys on one of the roofs, in which by often looking at them she had fancied ugly faces that were frowning over at her and trying to peer into the room, and she felt glad when it grew too dark to make them out, though she was very sorry too, when the man came to light the lamps to the street, for it made it late, and very dull inside. (79)

The "ugly faces" created out of the chimneys remind us of the "hideous faces" among the curios in the shop. Nell's distorted vision of the outside is not very far from that of the inside; therefore, her grandfather's home is no safer for her than the external world. In addition, Nell's reactions to the grotesque vision are again ambiguous because she is obsessively attracted to the window. She can indulge in her own fancy at the window just as the labourer at the industrial town keeps watching the furnace fire, seeing "strange faces and different scenes" in it (344). It seems that, however terrifying the grotesque transformation may be, the indulgence in fancy enables Nell to escape the immediate fear she has to confront, that is, the fear concerning her grandfather, since the fear she feels at the sight of the grotesque world is too vague to really torment her.

Although Nell and her grandfather attempt to escape from the terrors lurking in their life in London, the scenes they witness during their journey are no less terrifying than the "ugly faces" of the chimneys. The horseracing town presents a "delirious scene": "Here all was tumult and confusion; the streets were filled with throngs of people." She is not attracted to this crowded scene at all, but merely "frightened and repelled" (153). The industrial town offers another instance of the crowded scenes, but its significance for her is different from that of the horseracing town. Filled with a "dismal gloom," it manifests "the horror of oppressive dreams" where, "blasting all things living or inanimate," the smoke from chimneys blurs the normal distinction among individual objects (346-47). These indiscriminate objects undergo grotesque transformation, and the distinctions between animate and inanimate are transgressed; engines turn into "strange creatures" or "wrathful monsters",

and chimneys discharge "black vomit" whereas people tend the engines, fed their tributary fires" as if the machines were master to them. Although these transformations suggest oppressive realities quite alien to the child heroine, she has "no fear for herself" on arriving at this town (348). The grotesque description of the industrial town bears out Dickens's denunciation of the dehumanizing conditions of labourers in factories, which he is to attack more extensively later in *Hard Times*, but no matter how effective the social criticism may be, one cannot help noticing his active imagination fully at work in this description. Nell's own vision no longer corresponds to the narrator's. She is a passive agent here, though her innocent, helpless presence enhances the oppressive nature of the realities.

Nevertheless, Nell's imagination still perceives the terrifying grotesque after she leaves London. The grotesque vision she sees among wax-works is obviously horrible. Although she does not have any fear for the wax works at first, they become threatening to her "for their own sakes" once she thinks of Quilp:

> Then there were so many of them with their great glassy eyes—and, as they stood one behind the other all about her bed, they looked so like living creatures, and yet so unlike in their grim stillness and silence, that she had a kind of terror of them for their own sakes . . . . (224)

The horrors latent in the grotesque wax-works come to the surface as soon as Nell associates them with the image of Quilp. In fact, the association between Quilp and the wax-works seems farfetched in visual terms, since the

"death-like faces" in which she recognizes the resemblance to Quilp can hardly be counted among his characteristics, except that his face is outrageously removed from normal human features. The association largely derives from Nell's obsession with the image of the grotesque dwarf, whose existence, in her mind, epitomizes all the fears she has for the external world at large. Ironically, the deviation from the normal is perceived by her as reflection of the realities in the normal life. In this respect, one may say that her ambivalent relationship with the grotesque, which makes her at once congenial and alien to the waxworks, clarifies her inadequacy in life; her purity, apparently too idealistic to cope with life, draws her close to the grotesque effigies which inhabit the border between animate and inanimate, or between life and death.

It is important to note that Nell is haunted by the image of Quilp, rather than tormented by the man himself: "Quilp indeed was a perpetual nightmare to the child, who was constantly haunted by a vision of his ugly face and stunted figure" (224). Her nightmare is materialized when a "Quilpine" figure steals into her room to rob her of money. The figure is "Quilpine" as long as the identity remains vague, though it is easy for anyone but her to recognize it as the old man seized with a gambling mania.[19] One may say that her reluctance to admit his vicious conduct prevents her from making the obvious identification. As the grotesque image of Quilp represents a vague horror, it is convenient for her when she requires some objects to blame. In this respect, it is significant that the incident of Nell's glimpse at the ancient

[19] The epithet, "Quilpine," is used by Gabriel Pearson to characterize the gambling mania of Nell's grandfather (83).

gateway has little to do with the rest of the novel, especially in comparison with his second pursuit of Nell and her grandfather: the episode of the second pursuit shows Quilp's successive actions including the appearance at Little Bethel before his departure, the confrontation with the single gentleman and Mrs Nubbles, and the eccentric gambols threatening her in the coach on his way back from the journey. The fact that he is merely observed by Nell in the scene of the first pursuit is also remarkable since such a passive role is unusual for the excessively active character. Critics tend to observe that Quilp threatens Nell, and drives her to death, but, in spite of his excessive malice, the dwarf does hardly anything directly harmful to her.[20] Rather, she seems to charge the horrifying image of Quilp with all her anxieties and fears. Although the central cause of her fears resides in her grandfather's delinquency, she does not allow herself to blame him but instead creates some other vague object which is supposed to drive the old man to madness. While Quilp's extraordinary appearances and gestures verge on fantasy, he stands firmly on the reality because his taking possession of the shop is apparently sanctioned by the socioeconomic system. Moreover, his radical physicality in appetite and violence so closely connects him to the material world that he is quite appropriate to epitomize Nell's fear of the real world. She chooses him in order to displace the real fears which remain vague in her consciousness.

The grotesque people and objects, including the ruined buildings, do not arouse terror in Nell because they are oscillating between life and death, for

---

[20] Michael Steig points out, "although [Nell] has frightening dreams about Quilp's pursuit of her, her worst dreams are about her grandfather, the main cause of her illness and death" ("Abuse" 106).

she herself is close to death. However, the grotesque visions in the novel are actually threatening to her. In Wolfgang Kayser's view, "[t]he grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death" (185). Likewise, the grotesque visions are often employed to show Nell's fear of life in the sense that she is incompatible with the real world. Although Quilp belongs to the past as a devil of the Middle Ages,[21] he paradoxically represents the anxieties inherent in modern society, for his economical, inhuman power is the cause of Nell's calamity which begins with her grandfather's financial ruin.

Bakhtin's Grotesque Realism and *The Old Curiosity Shop*: The Comic and the Grotesque

As I have argued, what threatens Nell is the image of Quilp created in her imagination rather than Quilp himself. It is true that his demonic malice justifies the horrors evoked in Nell's vision, but his grotesqueness is not wholly given over to horrors in this novel. In Kayser's view, laughter is also indispensable for grotesque art, and among other writers who recognize comic elements inherent in the grotesque, Mikhail Bakhtin is conspicuous in accentuating the importance of laughter in his concept of "grotesque realism." Bakhtin's argument sounds extreme—for instance when he declares that "gloom is completely alien to the entire development of this world up to the romantic period" (47)—but his concept of the grotesque is relevant to the consideration of Dickens's writings. In relation to laughter, the grotesque adds another instance of ambivalence: "the grotesque is," as Ruskin puts it, "in

---

[21] G. K. Chesterton says: "Quilp is precisely the devil of the Middle Ages; he belongs to that amazingly healthy period when even lost spirits were hilarious" (283).

almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful" (LI: 151). Quilp, the most grotesque character in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, or arguably in all of Dickens's novels, is endowed with comic aspects as well as terrifying ones, and offers an alternative to the idealistic worldview that dominates the Nell-centered story.

Nell's early reaction to Quilp contains laughter in spite of the dominant horror: "while she entertained some fear and distrust of the little man, she was much inclined to laugh at his uncouth appearance and grotesque attitude" (46). After starting on a wandering journey with her grandfather, Quilp becomes nothing but an object of horror for her. She seems to lose the inclination towards boisterous laughter which she possesses at the outset: she is witnessed "bursting into a hearty laugh" at the sight of the eccentric, grotesque appearance of Kit (9). Laughter is remarkably lacking around Nell in her journey probably because playfulness is too vulgar for her. Ruskin observes: "the idea of any kind of play can only be associated with the idea of an imperfect, childish, and fatigable nature" (LI: 152); these qualities are hardly allowed access to the pure, perfect heroine. She carries exclusively the terrifying image of the grotesque dwarf, while the comic aspects of Quilp are mostly left in London. The novel is remarkably divided between Nell's pilgrimage and the city, and the urban lives without Nell are full of the hilarious grotesque.

In grotesque realism, the material body forms a central image, which is always comical, evoking carnivalesque laughter. Quilp's eccentric appearance and actions defy any normal criteria of reality; Michael Hollington asserts that Quilp is "an essentially ambiguous figure inhabiting the borderline of

fantasy and 'reality'" (*Dickens* 85). And yet he is closely connected to the real world by his very physicality, however extravagant it may be; N. J. Newman observes: "If Nell's function is, however oddly, essentially metaphysical and to do with the exclusion of the material world. Quilp is essentially physical" (79). His physical abnormalities make his akin to Bakhtin's grotesque body, which is "unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (26). Considered apart from Nell, his ugliness does not evoke so much horror as laughter. The first instance of the ambivalence in his physical appearance is the incongruous combination of the dwarfish stature and the giant head. Dwarfs and giants are put on the freak show of Mr Vuffin, "the proprietor of a giant and a little lady without legs or arms" (147); by combining the two polarized extremes, Quilp's body acquires further ambiguity. In addition, various of his physical features are often likened to one or another animal both by the narrator and other characters, which suggests that he is a sort of hybrid between human and animal, the motif often employed by grotesque art. He is likened to such a variety of animals that his body seems even mutable. His protean body is still closely connected to the external world in the sense that it refuses to be perfected, individual, and isolated. Whereas Nell's beauty is complete in itself, and separated from the outer world, Quilp's ugliness is physically connected to the real world, paradoxically to the extent that goes beyond reality.

Quilp's close connection with popular entertainment confirms the comic aspects of his grotesque art. His resemblance to Punch, which I have mentioned, is most conspicuous, showing that Quilp's physicality is not only presented in his outer appearance but in his excessively violent, Punch-like

behaviour and action. The puppet Punch is not shown in full play on the stage; instead, as a human version of the grotesque puppet, Quilp plays a most active part in the novel as Punch usually does in the puppet show. Punch's violence is even hilarious in that his indiscriminate, universal aggression suggests vitality that triumphs over the ordinary world. Quilp inherits Punch's hilarious violence.[22] The dwarf's violence is very likely to evoke laughter in readers as Punch's does in spectators. In addition, he has a strong inclination to laugh himself: he always smiles, grins, and laughs in his ceaseless vigorous actions. He is driven by no clear motive but childish malice that is capricious enough to be identified with children's inclination for mirth, which is denied to Nell.

His physicality is also expressed in his indulgence in creature comforts. "Eating and Drinking are", says Bakhtin, "one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body" in that the act of eating and drinking transgresses the "limits between man and the world" (281). Quilp emphasizes his gargantuan appetite by eating "hard eggs, shell and all" and "gigantic prawns with the heads and tails on," and drinking "boiling tea without winking" (42). His appetite even assumes a cannibalistic tinge: "I don't eat babies; I don't like 'em" (166). Although his sexuality, especially in his approach to Nell, is often pointed out, he appears rather cannibalistic than sexual, though the two may be not easily distinguished, when he tells Nell "to be my wife, my little cherry-cheeked, red-lipped wife" (48). Pearson rightly comments that Quilp's words can have an effect of "positively putting flesh on her" (86). This corporealization of a sacred being like Nell is important in

[22] See in particular Bennett 430-31, and Schlicke *Dickens* 125-28.

terms of grotesque realism. "The essential principle of grotesque realism" according to Bakhtin "is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (19-20). Appropriately, the grotesque dwarf's appetite throws into the "indissoluble unity" even the anti-physical heroine who has a tendency towards seclusion and isolation.

The emphasis on Quilp's physicality suggests that he is open to the external world in the way that the grotesque body has "a cosmic and at the same time an all-people's character" (Bakhtin 19). Looking upon the grotesque as "the organising principle of [Dickens's] art" in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, A. E. Dyson argues that Dickens's is "a world where openness to experience, however sophisticated or unsophisticated, is a prerequisite to any other virtues there may be" (21, 40). Although Dyson is sympathetic towards Nell, one can hardly find in her character any traces of "openness to experience," which Quilp decidedly has in abundance.

The itinerant entertainers Nell encounters share some characteristics of the hilarious grotesque. These entertainers are hardly shown in performance, but in pursuit for personal profits;[23] in the emphasis on their individualistic selfishness, their participation in the hilarious grotesque is rather limited. Still, they retain many traces of the grotesque even off stage. The congregation of the entertainers at Jolly Sandboys Inn presents an image of a grotesque collection of miscellaneous objects and people: puppeteers, dogs and their manager, a proprietor of a giant and dwarf, a silent magician, Nell

[23] Schlicke sees the decline of popular entertainment in the entertainers' mercenary greed in the novel (*Dickens* 120-22).

and her senile grandfather, and a jolly master of the inn. The stew served there is symbolic of the carnivalesque worldview not only because it presupposes the act of eating, but also because various materials are fused in it to form a hilarious merger:

> "It's a stew of tripe," said the landlord smacking his lips, "and cow-heel," smacking them again, "and bacon," smacking them once more, "and steak," smacking them for the fourth time, "and peas, cauliflowers, new potatoes, and sparrow-grass all working up together in one delicious gravy." (141)[24]

Even the misanthropic Codlin is mollified by this sight. A conversation about giants and dwarfs takes place in a festive mood, but Nell does not participate in it. Although she is surely awake in this scene, her response to their conversation is strangely unmentioned.

Mrs Jarley, another character who engages in popular entertainment, is also conspicuous for love of food and drink as she is incessantly eating and drinking. She gives voice to the value of appetite: "You always have your appetites too, and what a comfort that is!" In contrast to this observation, Nell reveals her insensitivity to the importance of appetite, thinking that she can "sometimes dispense with her own appetite very conveniently" (208). Although Mrs Jarley's kindness renders her far more congenial to Nell than

---

[24] Investigating Rabelais's influence on Dickens in *The Old Curiosity Shop* from the standpoint of Bakhtinian carnivalesque, Mark M. Hennelly Jr. points out the significance of the tripe of this scene ("Carnivalesque" 68-69).

Codlin and Short, Nell's indifference to appetite makes clear the irreconcilable discrepancy between the hilarious grotesque and herself.

Other characters in London more or less partake of the hilarious grotesque though they cannot hope to equal him. The Brasses, Quilp's accomplices, share physical ugliness with him. Sampson Brass is described as "the ugliest piece of goods in all the stock" in the curiosity shop (100); Sally Brass's androgynous appearance irresistibly attracts Dick Swiveller's curiosity. Tom Scott, Quilp's "hopeful assistant" (377), has a tenacious habit of standing on his head, presenting a typical image of "degradation and debasement of the higher" in grotesque realism (Bakhtin 21). The Marchioness, originally intended as an illegitimate child between Quilp and Sally Brass, is another dwarf, and called "little devil" by Sally (392); her appetite, though arising from the ill treatment by the Brasses, is savage enough to hint at her kinship with Quilp. Furthermore, she literally lives underground, hardly going out of the basement. These grotesque figures in London, according to Steven Marcus, inhabit the "underground world" (156). One may say that they are physically united with, or absorbed into, the earth by their underground life.

The outward appearance of Dick Swiveller is not so markedly ugly as those of the underground figures, but he plays a peculiarly important role in the grotesque art of the novel. Like Nell, he sometimes shares with the narrator the perception that can detect the grotesque in everyday life. However, he is utterly different from Nell in that he willfully strives to find the hilarious grotesque in the ordinary by the working of his creative imagination, and throws himself into the grotesque, while Nell is merely

scared of the threatening grotesque vision realized through her passive relation to the external, alien world. In the office of the Brasses, he finds: "She-dragons in the business, conducting themselves like professional gentlemen; plain cooks of three feet high appearing mysteriously from underground" (267). While Nell feels repulsion towards Quilp, Dick is quite receptive to the dragons and the underground dwarf, thinking, "It's my destiny" (267). His grotesque creativity almost equals the author's. After he calls Sally "dragon", the narrator adopts that appellation, and continues to describe her as "dragon". Likewise, the narrator employs the appellation that Dick coins, "Marchioness," to refer to the otherwise nameless servant; "by naming her" Garrett Stewart shrewdly remarks, "Dick almost brings her into being" (105).

Quilp's comic aspects are not fully aligned with carnivalesque laughter in that he scarcely shares mirth with other characters however funny he may be to readers: "The dwarf's humour, as we know, was to have a fireside to himself; and when he was disposed to be convivial, to enjoy himself alone" (519). He laughs at the expense of others, and he hates to be laughed at. His laughter is never sympathetic, and therefore far from universal. Tom Scott may be a possible exception because between him and Quilp there is "a strange kind of mutual liking" (44), but even he is not allowed to join his master's mirth:

> But, just as [Quilp] was contemplating [Mrs Quilp], and chuckling excessively, he happened to observe that Tom Scott was delighted too; wherefore, that he might have no presumptuous partner in his glee, the

> dwarf instantly collared him, dragged him to the door, and after a short scuffle, kicked him into the yard. (520)

Although Quilp is often conscious of audience in his eccentric behaviour as are professional entertainers, his intention is not to amuse them but almost invariably terrify or torment them. Pretending to enjoy the company of Sampson Brass and Dick Swiveller, he is in fact delighted in his inner schemes against them; he offers drink to them because he knows it torments them. His "horribly grotesque and distorted face with the tongue lolled out" (42) is obviously intended to be viewed by his mother-in-law, Mrs Jiniwin, exclusively to scare her.

As for Dick, he loves eating and drinking—though not so extravagantly as Quilp, or even as the Marchioness—and he also loves to see others eating and drinking. Seeing the Marchioness starving in the basement kitchen, he treats her to sumptuous feast. Later when Kit is captivated in prison, Dick sends him beer just to please him. His mirth is more universal and less individualistic than Quilp's. The episode in which Dick and the Marchioness play cards illustrates how open he is to others. He is eager to indulge in fictions of his own creation like rosy wine transformed from gin-and-water, and a piece of furniture used both as a bookcase and a bed; in the same way, he is ready to become part of the grotesque world. While Quilp and most of the grotesque characters are inhabitants of the realm between reality and fantasy, Dick has an existence out of the grotesque world so that he has a privileged perception of the grotesque from outside; therefore, he is all the more conscious of the positive value of the hilarious grotesque. Garrett

Stewart rightly observes: "[Dick] is a contingent, an imperfect universe torn between absolutisms of Quilp and Nell" (113). Paradoxically, Quilp's peerless grotesqueness is so extreme that it almost loses ambivalent nature inherent in the grotesque, and comes to be associated with "absolutism"; the ambivalent, "imperfect universe" is left to the less grotesque Dick.

Dick survives with other comic characters in London whereas the other two centres of the novel, Nell and Quilp die. Although Kit, who is left alive in London with Dick, gives the fond memory of Nell to his children, significantly at the very end of the novel, Kit cannot spot the place where the curiosity shop was located: "he soon became uncertain of the spot, and could only say it was thereabouts, he thought, and that these alterations were confusing" (575). Death has taken Nell so far above the living people that she can no longer have any position in the ever-changing life. One should note that Kit also involves himself in the "confusing" changes, or even creates changes himself. After the heroine's death, he marries Barbara, as Dick marries the Marchioness, and begets children. The case is the same with Quilp's death: Tom Scott starts a new life and succeeds in a new profession with a new name, and Mrs Quilp enters on a second marriage. The comic ending of the novel seems to affirm the real lives, which are continually progressing, growing, and fertile, in contrast to the static idealisation around Nell. It is significant that there is no Nell among Kit's children, as Malcolm Andrews points out ("Introduction" 25). Nell's pure, virtuous existence is incompatible with the physical world that is ambivalently, and grotesquely in a sense, unfinished, continuing to transform itself.

Dickens's Grotesque Art in *The Old Curiosity Shop*

The Old Curiosity Shop is roughly divided into three distinct parts—Nell's sacred journey to death, Quilp's anarchic activity, and the life in London with Dick Swiveller at its centre.[25] The very coexistence of these heterogeneous worlds are grotesque in the sense that it enacts juxtapositions of incongruous elements as frequent transformations of pantomime do. Furthermore, grotesque elements have peculiar functions in each of these worlds. Nell's problematic relationships with the surrounding people and objects reveal that the grotesque is at once alien and congenial to the heroine; Quilp embodies its demonic and energetic aspects to an excessive extent; Dick suggests creative, comic possibilities of grotesque realism in Bakhtinian line.

Critics tend to praise one of these parts, and the divergence of opinions illustrates the disparity within the novel, manifesting the essence of Dickens's grotesque art. The important point is that he manages to express different, incongruous worldviews with almost equal intensity. The grotesque motif that bears heterogeneous connotations in itself presents all the more complexity for being treated by the three irreconcilable worlds in their own ways. The grotesque is particularly appropriate for his ambivalent position about such issues as the Victorian Gothicism, because the grotesque can be at once positive and negative, hilarious and terrifying.

As the novel's central image is the grotesque people and objects surrounding the pure child, it is no wonder that the whole novel is intricately ambivalent and divided; whereas the grotesque picture, epitomizing the entire

---

[25] Pearson recognizes the three incompatible "forces" in the novel, Nell's, Quilp's and Dick's.

book, is created by the incongruous juxtaposition of beauty and ugliness, their fundamental incompatibility brings about the formal separation between the two realms of pure idealism and grotesque realism. Because of inherent coexistence of heterogeneous, conflicting ingredients, the complexity of the grotesque in the book is ever growing. For instance, the spotless herself comes close to the grotesque owing to her unearthly existence, and the realistic realm is further divided into Quilp's demonic and Dick's humanly comic worlds. Dickens, as a great grotesque artist, fully explores the ambivalent nature inherent in this aesthetic conception in the most grotesque novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

Chapter 4

Martin Chuzzlewit: Pantomimic Transformation with Incongruities and Irregularities

A. E. Dyson regards the "transformation" that sets almost everything into a comic framework as "the true organising principle" of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and finds its source in Dickens's "exuberant, unbridled fancy" (94-95). Most of us would admit the importance of exuberant fancy in *Chuzzlewit*, but his conception of "comic framework" seems rather vague. Still Dyson is insightful in arguing that the rioting fancy that brings about transformations holds the central position in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, though the term "transformation" requires some qualification. In my opinion, transformations taking place in this novel are similar in nature to those seen in pantomime, where the scenery and the identity of people and objects magically change in an instant.[1] In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, as in unstable spaces of pantomime, everything seems ready for transformation. The transformation in this novel is not so conceptual as Dyson's view of "comic transformation" suggests, but mainly physical as on the pantomime stages. Not unlike a magical wand, Dickens's imagination presents a hilarious world of pantomime in the prose

[1] For transformation in pantomime, see Introduction above.

fiction.

In this chapter, first, in order to give some idea about general characteristics of the transformations in the novel, we see how the imagination of Tom Pinch, a character apparently mild yet presented with great favour of the author, brings about metamorphoses of scenes. Next, several descriptive passages are examined with special attention to the overflowing details and the irregular spaces that generate exuberant instability of pantomimic transformation. Third, we investigate the relationship between the transformed or transforming scenes and the comic characters. Through these examinations, we wish to show how Dickens's pantomimic vision fully at work in the arguably last of his early comic novels.

Tom Pinch's Vision of Salisbury

Dickens shows a peculiar attitude toward Tom Pinch, who holds a significant position in the novel. Beginning with the sound of the organ he plays, the final part of the novel consists entirely of the narrator's apostrophe to him. Corresponding to this ending, Hablôt K. Browne's frontispiece, which was executed under the instruction of Dickens, sets Tom playing the organ at the centre, with other characters and scenes from the novel surrounding him, as if he were, to borrow Alexander Welsh's words, "the dreamer of the whole composition" (Welsh 23-25).

Despite the privileged position Tom occupies, critics have not made much of this character. Those who appreciate the comic characters such as

Pecksniff and Mrs Gamp are quite indifferent to Tom's "priggishness".[2] Even Dickens himself seems to stand somewhat aloof from him. J. Hillis Miller says that Dickens "cannot help betraying by his patronizing tone the fact that he would rather sympathize at some distance from such a character, than actually be such a person" (*Charles Dickens* 122). The patronizing manner may be there, but Dickens's attention to this character is not without the tender affection that would be bestowed on children. The privilege accorded to Tom comes not a little from Dickens's appreciation of the innocent perception peculiar to childhood, which is inseparable from the enjoyment of popular entertainment.[3]

At the first appearance of Tom, the narrator tells us that he is "extremely short-sighted" (18), but soon after, it becomes clear that his "short-sighted" eyes can see what normal ones could not.

> "Go your ways," said Pinch, apostrophising the coach: "I can hardly persuade myself but you're alive, and are some great monster who visits this place at certain intervals, to bear my friends away into the world. . . ." (25)

As the coach takes on its own life and turns into a "monster," Tom's "short-sighted" eyes see something different from realities. His imagination, together with his subjective impression about the perceived object, creates a

---

[2] Guerard 243.

[3] On the association between popular entertainment and childhood in Dickens, see Schlicke *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, 14-32.

fantastic vision which embraces not only the absent but the unreal.

As the view of Salisbury typifies the world according to Tom, it will be worthwhile to examine his journey to Salisbury closely. Sylvère Monod rightly points out that the narrator adopts the "naïve viewpoint" of Tom for the description of Salisbury (129-30). The narrator gives an account of the charm the city has for him.

> Mr Pinch had a shrewd notion that Salisbury was a very desperate sort of place; an exceeding wild and dissipated city: . . . he set forth on a stroll about the streets with a vague and not unpleasant idea that they teemed with all kinds of mystery and bedevilment. (68)

This quotation shows that Tom is not attracted to a beautiful, healthy scene, but a seemingly sordid, "dissipated" one, filled with "mystery and bedevilment." Extracting "the essence of Dickens's world" from a passage of "The Christmas Tree" in which Dickens describes the Christmas experiences in his childhood, Angus Wilson regards "the delight charged with terror (and—for this reversible quality is one of the secrets of his world—the terror charged with delight)" as part of "the essence" (12). Such mixed or contradictory sensations are essential to Dickens's grotesque art, which is, as Michael Hollington shows, closely linked to the contemporary popular theatre.[4] Thus, confusing the potentially terrifying with the delightful, Tom's childlike curiosity is presented as congenial to the grotesque scene that is to

---

[4] Hollington *Dickens* 8-12.

be unfolded in Salisbury even before he arrives there.

We are shown that the riotous scene of Salisbury is distorted by Tom's eyes:

> To one of his quiet habits this little delusion was greatly assisted by the circumstance of its being market-day, and the thoroughfares about the market-place being filled with carts, horses, donkeys, baskets, waggons, garden-stuff, meat, tripe, pies, poultry, and huckster's wares of every opposite description and possible variety of character. (68)

One can see from this passage that the scene that promotes his "little delusion" is a collection of miscellaneous objects. The narrator goes on to accumulate not only miscellaneous objects, but also miscellaneous human figures; the variety of common people, their costumes, their actions, and their personal effects come and go before Tom's eyes. At the end of the paragraph comes "a great confusion of tongues, both brute and human" (69). This is an ecstatic moment in which the miscellaneous objects converge into tumultuous, but delightful, sounds, which are inseparable from the chaotic sight. Tom's short-sighted eyes can no longer distinguish between objects so that the collective whole absorbs all the items into a kinetic mass.

At the next stage, Tom himself ceases to be a mere observer, and, in a way, participates in the chaos:

> Mr. Pinch regarded everything exposed for sale with great delight, and was particularly struck by the itinerant cutlery, which he

> considered of the very keenest kind, insomuch that he purchased a pocket knife with seven blades in it, and not a cut (as he afterwards found out) among them. (69)

The tumultuous market scene attracts him so much that he cannot resist the impulse to throw himself into it. He is in fact deceived by an itinerant vendor, but being cheated is part of his delight, or, if he feels disappointment at all, it counts as nothing beside the pleasure of looking wistfully at and taking possession of the knife. It seems as if he has been ready to be cheated from the first; it must be pleasant for him to feel himself involved in the mystery.

After that, Tom's attention is attracted by a variety of shops: the jewellers' booksellers', chemists', and tailor's. The bookshops have special attraction for him; above all, the shop for children's books leads him to the fantastic world of *Tales of the Genii* and *Arabian Nights*, the favourite books of David Copperfield and Dickens himself in their childhood:

> Which matchless wonders, coming fast on Mr. Pinch's mind, did so rub up and chafe that wonderful lamp within him, that when he turned his face towards the busy street, a crowd of phantoms waited on his pleasure, and he lived again, with new delight, the happy days before the Pecksniff era. (70)

The scene, which has been pleasant to him in itself, undergoes a further transformation, and becomes "a crowd of phantoms". The books for children

serve as a medium to take him to the happy childhood, but we must not ignore the fact that the very energetic miscellany of the scene has accelerated his tendency toward the unreal. The chaotic miscellany is close to the world of fantasy or popular entertainment; it is likely that the impulse to list the variety of people and things has the same root with the child's indulgence in the fantastic world.

It must be noted that the phrase, "the happy days before the Pecksniff era", seems to imply Tom's dissatisfaction with the present condition in spite of the apparent gratification he expresses in the life with Pecksniff. The excursion to Salisbury affords him a special occasion which releases him from all the constraints so that he can indulge in the world of fancy. Tom's view of Salisbury is only a mild version of fancy which is at work in *Chuzzlewit* as a whole. Critics like Philip Collins and Paul Schlicke see Dickens's fancy as integral to his moral conviction,[5] but the unleashed energy of *Chuzzlewit* often defies the apparent moral scheme of the book; the grotesque style derived from pantomimic vision which Dickens's fancy and the contemporary popular entertainment share does not necessarily carry moral value as in the case of Tom's innocent view, but makes ambiguous the seemingly established moral framework.

Multiplicity of Objects and Transformation

Susan R. Horton argues that the older mode of shopping characterized by "the fair, the miscellany, the bottle and bone shop" was more congenial to "a

---

[5] See for instance Collins "Queen Mab's Chariot" 78; Schlicke *Dickens* 17-18. Collins further develops the point in "*Carol* Philosophy".

strongly developed imagination and a spirit of bricolage" than the modern form of purchase at specialized shops. In the older mode of shopping, both buyers and sellers had to deal with unspecialized collection of miscellaneous objects out of which they created value by their own wits. Horton goes on to say that, nostalgically looking on the older mode of shopping, Dickens presents several shops in this mode such as the old curiosity shop, Uncle Sol's nautical shop in *Dombey and Son*, and Mr Venus's bottle and bone shop in *Our Mutual Friend* (Horton 212-13). As we have seen above, the fantastical transformation in Tom's view of Salisbury is, to a large extent, induced by the collection of miscellaneous objects crowded in the market and in the shops. Dickens's fascination with miscellanies in shops is seen in his earliest work, *Sketches by Boz*. According to J. Hillis Miller, the typical procedure of the narrator in *Sketches* is to look in at some shop-windows in London, and to imagine human agencies out of the articles in them and further to create stories from them ("The Fiction of Realism" 93-103). Miller emphasizes Boz's interpretation of "a collection of disconnected objects", his extraction of the meaning from them, but it is no less important to note that juxtapositions of miscellaneous objects stimulate Boz's active imagination. Boz is attracted toward the miscellanies in the shop-windows, where he can indulge himself in his imagination, and transform the ordinary into the fantastic.

Tom's experience resembles this, for his imagination manages to transform the articles sold in the shops. His fanciful vision is not limited to the shops of Salisbury, but he is also absorbed in the observation of miscellaneous objects in various scenes, especially in London where he

frequents "the market places, bridges, quays, and especially the steam boat wharves" (588), where crowds of people and objects are milling about. The city is as it were a larger miscellany shop with heterogeneous goods. In his argument about the "urban grotesque" in Dickens's works, Michael Hollington emphasizes the importance of "the experience of incongruous juxtapositions, associations, continuities and discontinuities" in the city (*Dickens* 56). As Dickens's grotesque art largely derives from his perception of the urban miscellany, the confusing scenes that the city presents are fundamental to the transformation that his imagination brings about.

One of the most famous passages in Dickens that represent the urban confusion is the description of the view from Todgers's, in which chaotic mass of objects are presented as if they had their own lives before an anonymous spectator. Dorothy Van Ghent, who first drew critics' attention to the passage, finds in the novels of Dickens "a world undergoing a gruesome spiritual transformation", where the inanimate objects are animated and human beings turn into things; she takes the view from Todgers's as an example of "naked and aggressive existence" hidden in inanimate objects ("The Dickens World" 419, 426). After her essay, much emphasis has been laid on darker aspects of the scene: Miller takes the view as a menace to the observer (*Charles Dickens* 116-18); Garrett Stewart regards it as "the dark underside of fancy", which makes a decided contrast with "the pleasant imagination" of Tom Pinch (174-78). The view from Todgers's may have menacing aspects, but it is not totally sinister. Practically, it is not very easy to distinguish between Todgers's vision and Tom's view in Salisbury. The view from Todgers's is a delight as well as a threat; it depends on whether

one has a mind to take pleasure in this chaotic scene. The anonymous observer, who is seized with what Van Ghent calls "suicidal nausea" ("The Dickens World" 426), is lacking in the playful spirit that the narrator exhibits by the indulgence in minute description of the scene. John Carey's comment on Dickens's novels in general most fittingly applies to this novel: "The materials of horror may be there, but they are transmuted by humour into something more spirited and resilient" (*Violent Effigy* 207). Van Ghent is nonetheless right in regarding the view from Todgers's as typical of the Dickens world; at least, it is representative of the *Chuzzlewit* world. Todgers's view has the same fascination as the Salisbury market has to Tom. In both descriptions, miscellaneous objects are listed; in the former:

> Then there were steeples, towers, belfries, shining vanes, and masts of ships: a very forest. Gables, house-tops, garret-windows, wilderness on wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world. (126)

The urban congruities that attract Dickens are thus reflected in his descriptive prose. Patrick J. McCarthy counts the listing of people and things as one of the "linguistic effects" in *Chuzzlewit.* In fact, this book is filled with collections of people and things. Tom's view of the wharf presents one of such lists, and a variety of objects, human and inhuman, throng before Tom's eyes again: "there they were, all jumbled up together, any summer morning, far beyond Tom's power of separation" (588). In most of the lists that appear in the book, each object loses its own boundaries, and becomes an indiscriminate part of the whole scene, so that it is no longer possible to

separate one object from another; discarding their own identities, these objects are absorbed into an energetic whole. Then each item undergoes a transformation in defiance of the ordinary conception as in pantomime, animation of inanimate objects being a typical phase of such transformation.

The grotesque voice that William F. Axton finds in Dickens's description of scenes in relation to pantomime involves "figurative transposition or juxtaposition of incompatible or discrepant realms" such as "the inanimate and the animate, the bestial and the human, the familiar and the exotic" as well as:

> the intermixture of commonplace items drawn from two or more widely separated contexts, the fantastic proliferation of concrete realistic details far in excess of any descriptive necessity, together with a no less extravagant proliferation of fanciful imagery drawn from nursery rhymes, fairy tales, children's literature, legend, and folk mythology. (155-56)

These characteristics comprehend most of the six linguistic effects McCarthy finds in *Chuzzlewit*: "animism", "superlative expressions", "odd collocations", "lists", "reworked clichés", and "animal imagery." Such stylistic features are, as Axton shows, favoured tactics of the Victorian popular theatre, especially harlequinade in which incongruous elements are juxtaposed by magic transformation. The descriptions crowded people and objects in *Chuzzlewit* create plenitudinous scenes in which each item sheds off its individuality in the collective energy and begins to transmute itself as on pantomime stages.

Irregular Spaces and the City

The unstable effects that are made by scenes with lists of incongruous elements are also created by irregularities of spaces. On returning from America to England, Martin and Mark are delighted in the seaport "at sight of the old churches, roofs, and darkened chimney stacks of Home" (517); this scene perhaps suggests the confusion of objects which, as we have seen above, encourages pantomimic transformation. It seems that Martin and Mark feel a liberated sense partly because of the plenitude of the scene, as well as its association with home. Their hilarious mood seems to be enhanced by the strange-shaped room that they take at a tavern immediately after landing at the seaport.

> It was one of those unaccountable little rooms which are never seen anywhere but in a tavern, and are supposed to have got into taverns by reason of the facilities afforded to the architect for getting drunk while engaged in their construction. It had more corners in it than the brain of an obstinate man; was full of mad closets, into which nothing could be put that was not specially invented and made for that purpose; had mysterious shelvings and bulk-heads, and indications of staircases in the ceiling; and was elaborately provided with a bell that rung in the room itself, about two feet from the handle, and had no connexion whatever with any other part of the establishment. (518)

As is often pointed out, the light tone in the description of the seaport town largely derives from Dickens's own experience of returning from

America. It may be said that the irregular shape of the tavern room also reflects his own delights in architectural varieties in England. In *American Notes*, Dickens writes of Philadelphia: "It is a handsome city, but distractingly regular. After walking about it for an hour or two, I felt that I would have given the world for a crooked street" (107).[6] However, the disproportionate space of the tavern room is not so concerned with the contrast between America and England as F. S. Schwarzbach suggests, since America in *Chuzzlewit* is not remarkable for regularity. It will be closer to the truth to say that strange architecture is fundamental for Dickens's imagination. Despite his predilection for neatness, he offers abundant instances of strange-shaped buildings such as Peggotty's house in *David Copperfield* and Wemmick's castle in *Great Expectations*.[7] *Chuzzlewit* also has several irregular buildings which generally seem to be positively valued by the author. For instance, Tom and Ruth occupy "two small rooms and a triangular parlour" of "a singular little old-fashioned house" (544), and a room in Blue Dragon has "a low roof and a sunken flooring, all down hill from the door, and a descent of two steps on the inside so exquisitely unexpected, that strangers, despite the most elaborate cautioning, usually dived in head first, as into a plunging-bath" (28).

Several critics have pointed out the importance of architectural metaphor in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. One of such critics, Steven Connor, finds a

---

[6] Several critics cite this passage from *American Notes* to compare it with the tavern room. See, for example, Marcus *Dickens* 256-57, Schwarzbach 87, and Burke 30-31.

[7] Although Carey writes on Dickens's passion for neatness in the chapter "Dickens and Order" of his *The Violent Effigy*, he includes some instances of strange-shaped architecture as suggestive of neatness and safety (30-53).

"fundamental contrast between what might be called coherent or 'architectural' space and, on the other hand, incoherent, or 'social' space" ("Babel" 187). His attention is concentrated on spatial density of "incoherent space", but what he calls "incoherent space" is, in my view, also marked by unexpected, even distorted shape. The tavern room in the port town surely gives the impression of density, as Connor would suggest, in the sense that several objects seem to be jumbled in it, but the real cause of such sense of plenitude is rather given by the unusual forms of these objects. By defying their proper functions—as one sees, for instance, in the bell that has "no connexion whatever with any other part of the establishment"—the interiors of the tavern room intrusively claim the observer's attention. As their shapes do not conform to the ordinary conception, they offer mysteries that the observer has to interpret by his imagination; in this sense, the instability of the space seems to energize the fanciful transformation that, as we have seen, the plenitude of people and objects effect. Distorted spaces and incongruous combinations have similar effects that permit digressions toward an alternative world. It is no wonder that Steven Connor seems to confuse spatial distortion and density, for these qualities both produce the effects of deviating from the ordinary world. Furthermore, these qualities often come together. For instance, Mrs Gamp's apartment, far from being spacious, yet filled with miscellaneous objects, creates a disproportionate, irregular shape particularly because of the huge bedstead. The combining effects of multiplicity and disproportion in this room create a fantastic space where an alternative order is at work.

Todgers's Boarding-House is another instance of irrational

architecture. The structure of Todgers's defies functionality: Mrs Todgers's own room commands "at a perspective of two feet, a brown wall with a black cistern on the top" and the one for Miss Pecksniffs has "a mighty convenient little door, which would only open when fallen against by a strong person" (122-23); the drawing-room is "out of the common style" (139). These extraordinary structures produce mysteries because it is impossible to give a normal interpretation to them:

> But the grand mystery of Todgers's was the cellarage, approachable only by a little back door and a rusty grating: which cellarage within the memory of man had had no connexion with the house, but had always been the freehold property of somebody else, and was reported to be full of wealth: though in what shape—whether in silver, brass, or gold, or butts of wine, or casks of gunpowder—was matter of profound uncertainty and supreme indifference to Todgers's and all its inmates. (126)

Many critics pay attention to the ubiquitous mysteries in the novel, either emphasizing isolation between individuals, or postulating that the mysteries suggest a secret network hidden in the society.[8] However, it would be rather questionable to draw such conclusions, at least from the mystery of Todgers's cellar. Admittedly, isolation may be suggested by the separation of the cellar from the outside, and the inmates' "supreme indifference" to it, but

[8] For instance, Miller is on the side of "isolation" (*Charles Dickens* 109-11) while Schwarzbach tends toward "network" (96-99).

the narrator is not indifferent; he takes the trouble of mentioning the fanciful story invented from the mysterious cellar. As Tom Pinch is fascinated with "mystery and bedevilment" of Salisbury, the narrator is susceptible to mysteries, which stimulate his imagination to put colourful interpretations on them.

Filled with multitudinous crowds, disproportionate forms, and mysteries, the surroundings of Todgers's are even more chaotic than its interiors. The district where Todgers's is located is described as "mazes", "labyrinth" or "wilderness." Dickens often finds a labyrinthine nature of the city, and the neighbourhood of Todgers's can be seen as an epitome of Dickens's London. The urban labyrinth may imply an isolated individual who retires into his or her shell without any knowledge of neighbours, but for curious minds, the entangled space has an enormous attraction because it offers vast materials for their imagination. When Tom Pinch actually gets lost in the maze of London, his "guileless distrust of London" (546), or his childlike imagination, conjures up a strange world of fanciful vices, which are at once fearful and delightful, in the same way as "mystery and bedevilment" of Salisbury. The narrator seems to indulge in the lengthy description of the Todgers's and its neighbourhood, in which proliferation of chaotic details blurs the border between the real and the fantastic. Furthermore, the narrator seems to declare that such labyrinthine scenes are full of suitable material for writing:

> To tell of half the queer old taverns that had a drowsy and secret existence near Todgers's, would fill a goodly book; while a

second volume no less capacious might be devoted to an account of the quaint old guests who frequented their dimly lighted parlours. (125)

The city of *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a large labyrinthine space made up of smaller mazes such as the neighbourhood of Todgers's. Peter Conrad aptly says, "The heterogeneity of London is an important imaginative stimulus for Dickens. . . . A novel like *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in fact, is jerked onwards by chance encounters in London streets" (102-03). It is not necessary to recognize a hidden network that organizes the urban citizens in such chance encounters, as Schwarzbach suggests, for the entangled space seems to defy any systematic relationships between people. One should rather say that coincidences easily happen in a space filled with congestion and irregularity. What the often cited passage concerning the unrecognized relationship between Tom Pinch and Nadgett emphasizes is contingency in multitudinous lives of London, rather than an underlying structure that controls the city without being noticed:

> As there are a vast number of people in the huge metropolis of England who rise up every morning not knowing where their heads will rest at night, so there are a multitude who shooting arrows over houses as their daily business, never know on whom they fall. Mr Nadgett might have passed Tom Pinch ten thousand times; might even have been quite familiar with his face, his name, pursuits, and character; yet never once have dreamed that Tom had any interest in any act or mystery of his. (555)

We should note that random proximity in the city causes imaginative observers like Dickens to envisage fictional connections and to create extravagant stories in their minds because the plenitudinous space feeds their imagination to make an illusion that mundane realities transform themselves to diverge from the ordinary, rational order. Tom's indulgence in the crowds of objects is explained as a relief from the "monotonous routine of city lives":

> [I]t was very lively and fresh to see the people hurrying away upon their many schemes of business or pleasure; and it made Tom glad to think that there was that much change and freedom in the monotonous routine of city lives. (587)

The normal city lives may be regarded as "monotonous routine" from which one has to be liberated. The liberation is to some extent achieved by the urban plenitude that destabilizes the normal, established order of things and renders the static into the dynamic. The urban heterogeneity not just causes chance encounters, but serves as driving force for transformation to form the chaotic world of *Chuzzlewit*. Stimulated by the plenitude of the city, Dickens's pantomimic imagination presents the urban space in the manner that preserves, or exaggerates, the congruities and irregularities. Such aspects of the city give the sense of "change and freedom" as the popular entertainments were supposed to do.

Human Figures within the Chaotic Scene

Let us now turn to human subjects within the plenitudinous space examined above. Although Tom and probably the author himself feel "change and freedom" in seeing the crowded scene as spectators inevitably detached from it, those who are really part of the scene might not share the feeling; for them, their actions might be nothing but "monotonous routine." However, it seems that participants of plenitudinous scenes enjoy their collective lives. In the older, gregarious form of popular entertainment, as Schlicke shows, everybody participated in the chaotic, joyful scene of entertainment, and became selfless, that is to say, lost their individualities. Merging into the energy of the chaotic scene, people can be released from boundaries of their ordinary selves. Miller says that every character in *Chuzzlewit* faces the problem of "how to achieve an authentic self"; similarly, Steven Marcus argues that "the concern with the self, with the possibilities for establishing oneself in the world" is fundamental in *Chuzzlewit*.[9] However, the novel opens up the possibility of the opposite direction, and illustrates the releases from such existentialist pursuits of self in hilarious congregation of selfless people.

The crowded, irrational spaces often torment those who are not initiated in the mystery; especially, irregular spaces cause physical and mental harms to them. For instance, strangers "dive . . . in head first" to enter the room of Blue Dragon (28); the jumbled objects in Mrs Gamp's

[9] Miller, *Charles Dickens* 103; Marcus, *Dickens* 224-25.

apartment "endanger . . . the legs of a stranger" and "harass . . . the peaceful guest with inexplicable terrors" (703). The greatest hardships are inflicted by Todgers's and its neighbourhood. Those who aim to reach Todgers's are caught up in mazes and attacked by "resigned distraction" (124). The sufferings of anonymous observer of the view from Todgers's start the moment he reaches the top: "Whoever climbed to this observatory, was stunned at first from having knocked his head against the little door in coming out; and after that, was for the moment choked from having looked, perforce, straight down the kitchen chimney." Overwhelmed by the hallucinatory view, his trials culminate thus: "after gazing round him, quite scared, he turned into Todgers's again, . . . and ten to one he told M. Todgers afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut; that is to say, head-foremost" (126-27).

In consideration of exuberance of these chaotic scenes, it would be pointless to take their sufferings too gravely. The fact that most of the victims are hypothetical or anonymous considerably abates seriousness of the harms inflicted on them. The presence of these victims accentuates irrationality of the spaces, since they represent the normal order that these spaces are antagonistic to. Their sufferings may imply cruelty inherent in laughter in general, but in the hilarious atmosphere created from the plenitudinous spaces, the acrobatic feats that the victims perform or might perform like clowns add further exuberance to the pantomimic world of the chaotic scenes.

Unlike the victims who in some degree refuse to throw themselves into the chaotic spaces, Young Bailey, the only actual child among the main

characters, furnishes an example of merging into the energetic scenes. He enjoys the scene of the top of Todgers's, which scares the anonymous observer:

> [T]he youthful porter [Bailey] . . . being of a playful temperament, and contemplating with a delight peculiar to his sex and time of life, any chance of dashing himself into small fragments, lingered behind to walk upon the parapet. (127)

As "the only genuinely free character in the novel,"[10] Bailey not only joyfully throws himself into the hallucinatory view but also willfully augments vertiginous sensation by making himself physically unstable on a parapet. Counting *ilinx* or vertigo among the four essential impulses of play, Roger Caillois writes: "in *ilinx*, [the player] gratifies the desire to temporarily destroy his bodily equilibrium, escape the tyranny of his ordinary perception, and provoke the abdication of conscience" (44). Vertigo enables, or seems to enable, the player to be joyfully liberated from his or her own self both physically and mentally. One may say that Bailey enjoys the illusion that he is not an isolated individual any more by indulging in the vertiginous play. His love for vertigo is clearly illustrated in his various reckless feats in tending his master's cab. He drives the horse violently, and is seen, for instance, "standing now on one foot and now upon the other, now trying to look round the cab on this side, now on that, and now endeavouring to peep over the top of it, as it went dashing in among the carats and coaches" (406).

---

[10] Pratt 198.

He seems to aspire to the ultimate freedom in his defiance of the danger of injury. By destroying his own body into pieces, he might achieve literal selflessness, released from the physical limitations imposed by the natural law.

Merging in the exuberance scene is achieved by being part of the list made up of human items. When collected together, people form a plenitudinous sphere in which they enjoy their selfless lives though not so radically as Young Bailey. *Martin Chuzzlewit* has a wide variety of characters; this is confirmed by the lists of people such as the boarders of Todgers's in London and those of Pawkins's in New York, and the large attendance of the levees at the National Hotel.

Human items in the lists lose their identities in the same way as non-human items. The members of the party in the dining-room of Major Pawkins's make up a list, and the last items attract attention: "the rest were strangely devoid of individual traits of character, insomuch that any one of them might have changed minds with the other and nobody would have found it out" (261). In the American chapters, numerous Americans come and go rapidly, and in most cases never come back, as if these parts of the book were just a large list of noisy American characters. In the National Hotel, young Martin realizes a lack of individuality in American people:

> [W]herever half a dozen people were collected together, there, in their looks, dress, morals, manners, habits, intellect and conversation, were Mr. Jefferson Brick, Colonel Diver, Major Pawkins, General Choke, and Mr. La Fayette Kettle, over, and over, and over again. (332-33)

Most readers would agree with Martin in not being able to distinguish one American from another. It is not to say that they are not given any distinct qualities; in fact, they have differences as well as similarities at least in point of their external appearance: Brick's childlike figure, Diver's broad-brimmed hat, Pawkins's stolid movements, Choke's lankness, Kettle's addiction to tobacco plug, and so on. Despite these external differences, the similarities dominate largely because of Dickens's manner of presenting the Americans.

Although Dickens's unpleasant experiences in America are certainly reflected in the American chapters of *Chuzzlewit*, which sometimes assume a sarcastic tone, these parts of the novel are, as Albert Guerard suggests, "an act of the imagination rather than a disguised report of personal experience" (246). No one can believe that there were such people as the American characters depicted in the book. As Miller says, they "have no inner life; they exist only in public" (*Charles Dickens* 130), with possible exceptions of Bevan, the good American, and Scadder, the hypocrite. Bestowing nothing but surface on them, the author allows the Americans to be free from their inner realities and enjoy their hilarious lives of eccentricity. They are simply satisfied with the surface public lives, which are to them not the oppressive realities, but a gleeful world.

People make up a list in England as well. The commercial gentlemen of Todgers's are listed with their respective "turns", and come to lose their individualities in the sense that we cannot distinguish one boarder from another. One of the differences between the commercial gentlemen and the American characters lies in the fact that there is a slight suggestion of the

boarders' lives outside Todgers's: "They had all, it may be presumed, a turn for business; being all commercially employed in one way or other; and had, every one in his own way, a decided turn for pleasure to boot." Mr Jinkins, the head of boarders with a "fashionable turn," is the only person whose profession is mentioned; he turns out to be "a fish-salesman's book keeper" (140). In Todgers's, however, the commercial lives have no significance at all; what concerns is a "turn for pleasure." Every "turn" they possess is merged into the whole energy of the Todgers's world rather than attributed to an individual boarder, each boarder no longer shutting up himself in his own shell. In the Todgers's society, they can cast off their ordinary lives and acquire new existences.

Barnaby Rudge, the immediate predecessor of *Chuzzlewit* presents the danger of the energy engendered by a crowd of people; faceless members of the mob of the Gordon Riots are driven to sickening madness in this novel.[11] Collective people of *Chuzzlewit* are, however, essentially comic, and apparently harmless; the energy of the crowds goes no further than hilarious confusion and never reaches mindless violence except the sinister mob in Jonas's nightmare.

Individual Characters and Transformation

Unlike members of crowds who are allowed to dispense with the inner realities, many comic characters in *Chuzzlewit* are endowed with the energy

---

[11] Arguing that for the Victorian novelists, "the crowd is cruel, fickle and irrational, liable to be overcome by a collective madness," David Lodge cites passages from *Barnaby Rudge* to illustrate such a view of the crowd (111, 114).

of transformation in themselves. Some of them are inseparable from the energetic space of exuberance and incongruity. Young Bailey, as we have seen, merges into the chaotic view from Todgers's, and his friend, Poll Sweedlepipe, is also united to plenitudinous energy. The description of the birds he keeps in the shop is typical of the exuberant listings that we have seen:

> Game-cocks resided in the kitchen; pheasants wasted the brightness of their golden plumage on the garret; bantams roosted in the cellar; owls had possession of the bedroom; and specimens of all the smaller fry of birds chirrupped and twittered in the shop. The staircase was sacred to the rabbits. There, in hutches of all shapes and kinds, made from old packing cases, boxes, drawers, and tea-chests, they increased in a prodigious degree, and contributed their share towards that complicated whiff which, quite impartially, and without distinction of persons, saluted every nose that was put into Sweedepipe's easy shaving-shop. (396).

In addition, his profession is in itself an unexpected combination of the two that apparently have no relationship at all. However true to historical facts it may be, this odd combination of barber and bird fancier must have fascinated the author whose grotesque art derives its force from incongruities.

The unexpected combinations in the narrator's voice of this novel often take the form of metaphorical expressions, which are mostly used to describe the comic characters and their surroundings, and Sweedlepipe is one of such

characters: immediately after the description of the birds in the shop he is successively likened to the sparrow, the pigeon, the raven, the robin, and the magpie; he comes to be merged into the crowd of birds because of his "ornithological properties" (396).

Poll's characterization is thus made grotesque by the narrator's association of him with miscellaneous birds. He has many other grotesque features. In consequence of his double profession and the various qualities of birds in him, it is hard to determine Poll's fixed identity. Moreover, as his two names, "Paul" and "Poll", suggest that masculinity and femininity coexist in him. If Poll is a feminine man, Betsy Prig is his inverse, a masculine woman: "Mrs. Prig was of the Gamp build, but not so fat; and her voice was deeper and more like a man's. She had also a beard" (389). The feminine man and the masculine woman further destabilize the ordinary conception of gender especially when Poll admires her as "a woman of transcendent charms" (444). Furthermore, as Poll has childlike innocence and curiosity nearly equivalent to Tom Pinch's, he can be regarded as a hybrid of child and adult. In the character of a childlike adult, too, he has his inverse, Young Bailey, who is a child with some adult maturity. In the intercourse between Poll and Bailey, the ordinary relationship between adult and child is inverted: "Paul Sweedlepipe, the meek, was so perfectly confounded by his [Bailey's] precocious self-possession, and his patronising manner . . ." (399). Thus Poll Sweedlepipe subverts the ordinary cultural classification and refuses to remain static in a usual category.

According to Terry Castle, at the eighteenth-century masquerade, "one was obliged to appear, in some sense, one's opposite," and "counterposed

institutions everywhere collapsed into one another, as did ideological categories" (75-78). One may say that Poll is a remnant of the masqueraders who contained oppositions in their outer appearance. Such a character as Poll does not need costumes to transform himself, because the ambivalent nature is inherent in him. Although it might be impertinent to relate Poll's character to cultural institutions and dominant ideology, we can say at least that his character does not neatly conform to the dominant social order; he achieves a sort of liberation from the restrictions that the institutions demand on the individual level.

The subversion of cultural classification is not restricted to Poll, but found everywhere in the novel. The relationship of master and servant between Martin and Mark is abolished, and Mark becomes at first Martin's partner only in name, and then his genuine friend. Jonas and Anthony, at their first appearance, undermine the ordinary father-son relationship because the son looks very old: "the son has so well profited by the precept and example of the father that he looked a year or two the elder of the twain" (53). Age is an important factor to determine one's cultural position, but the narrator emphasizes the difficulty in deciding what age some characters are: Tom Pinch is introduced as "perhaps about thirty, but he might have been any age between sixteen and sixty" (18); Mrs Lupin, a widow, "burst into flower again" after the period of mourning, and has been "in full bloom" ever since (28); and Mrs Gamp refers to Mrs Mould as one of those whom "time runs back'ards with" (383). As these characters collapse the distinction between young and old, they are not bound to the ordinary limitations imposed at each stage of life.

Some characters more drastically transgress their own limitations by splitting or proliferating their personalities as if they undergo transformations of pantomime. One of the most obvious ways of splitting themselves is wearing an artificial mask. The art of disguising is closely related to the "general purpose and design" which Dickens mentions in the preface to the 1844 edition of *Chuzzlewit* (xxiii). According to Forster, "the notion of taking Pecksniff for a type of character was really the origin of the book" (I: 274). Pecksniff is a hypocrite, and if *Chuzzlewit* originated from the conception of this character, it is likely that hypocrisy has the central position in the book. Finding the theme that organizes the whole of *Chuzzlewit* in "a sort of selfish hypocrisy", Edward B. Benjamin says, "the characters illustrate different *aspects* of the theme, the action illustrates different phases of it" (45). He is right in seeing that the world of *Chuzzlewit* is full of hypocrites but the theme goes no further than presenting various examples with no apparent relations between one another, though it can hardly be said that this theme unifies the miscellaneous details of the novel. Actually there are many hypocritical characters in this novel in the sense that they are split into two or more personalities. Nevertheless, They do not sanction the simple distinction between false appearance and true inner life as the word "hypocrite" suggests, for it is often impossible to determine what is their true self simply because they seem to have no integrated personalities.

The evil character that Scadder hides is brought to the surface when something that the narrator calls "Truth" is seen to "twitch and jerk up and down in his throat," or when each profile of his face has "a distinct

expression": "It was like turning the man inside out, to pass to that view of his features in his liveliest mood, and see how calculating and intent they are" (335).[12] It seems to be presupposed that his real character is the greedy one hidden under the false appearance, but, as long as both sides of his double nature come to the surface, his "truth" is no longer hidden under the mask. The case of Mrs Todgers is more complex. She evinces external expressions similar to Scadder's: "she stood for some moments gazing at the sisters, with affection beaming in one eye, and calculation shining out of the other" (122). It seems clear that she exposes some of her mercenary mind hidden under the disguise, and that her affection is to be understood as insincere. It seems reasonable to think that her real nature is mercenary because the side she shows to Miss Pecksniffs is an affectionate one. However, the narrator later gives an apparently conflicting comment on her:

> Commercial gentlemen and gravy had tried Mrs Todgers's temper; the main chance . . . had taken a firm hold on Mrs. Todgers's attention. But in some odd nook of Mrs. Todgers's breast, up a great many steps, and in a corner easy to be overlooked, there was a secret door, with "Woman" written on the spring, which at a touch from Mercy's hand had flown wide open, and admitted her for shelter. (552)

The architectural metaphor employed here offers an irregular, mysterious

---

[12] Van Ghent takes these descriptions of Scadder as examples of "personality that has given itself to deceit, thus dividing itself unnaturally into a manipulating part and a manipulated part, a me-half and an it-half" ("The Dickens World 421).

space like her boarding house itself, suggesting that her personality partakes of irregularities and incongruities of the exuberant space of Todgers's. She is thus ready to transform herself; it is not surprising therefore that she turns so beautiful in Tom's short-sighted eyes that she is on the edge of transforming into a "Venus" (552).

There are more conscious actors than Mrs Todgers, who does not seem to enjoy her performance. Nadgett is one of such actors; working as a confidential agent of the Anglo-Bengalee, he hides, under seemingly harmless appearance, a tenacious pursuer who brings destruction to Jonas. His almost monomaniac predilection for secrets does not simply drive him to pursue diligently after them, but turns his own existence into a secret: "How he lived was a secret; where he lived was a secret; and even what he was, was a secret" (424). As the result of, or for the purpose of, effacing his own identity, he assumes multiple personalities; he has, as Monod points out, "some of the actor's capabilities" (105). Although he succeeds in keeping away from suspicions by disguising, with the result of exposing Jonas's secret crimes, most of his disguises are so ridiculously excessive that he seems to enjoy as well as utilize his unstable, protean being.

Comic characters like Seth Pecksniff, Sairey Gamp, Young Bailey, and with some qualification, Montague Tigg and Mark Tapley artificially assume multiple personalities even more skillfully and extemporaneously than Nadgett. It is not surprising that the narrator uses many of his metaphoric expressions to describe these characters and their surroundings, since they are endowed with so much energy that they are ready to transform themselves. Mrs Gamp is likened to "a passing fairy" that hiccups, as well as

"a feather-bed" (383, 672); her night cap becomes "a cabbage", and her watchman's coat to a real "watchman": "[Mrs Gamp] looked, behind, as if she were in the act of being embraced by one of the old patrol" (392). These figurative expressions connect the real and the unreal as the world of pantomime does, and Mrs Gamp is on the verge of stepping out of the boundaries of the real world. Like Mrs Todgers, Mark Tapley is presented with architectural metaphor, and his face becomes "a perfect dead wall of countenance"; the narrator sticks to this metaphor by adding that he starts "opening window after window in it, with astonishing rapidity, and lighting them all up as for a great illumination" (693). With Young Bailey, the unreal intrudes on the real more drastically. Before Poll's eyes, the fact that Bailey is a child is encroached on by illusions, and he becomes a mystery:

> And truly, though in the cloudy atmosphere of Todgers's Mr. Bailey's genius had ever shone out brightly in this particular respect, it now eclipsed both time and space, cheated beholders of their senses, and worked on their belief in defiance of all natural laws. . . . He became an inexplicable creature: a breeched and booted Sphinx. (399-400)

Here Bailey, with the help of Poll's credulity, can be liberated even from the restrictions imposed by "time and space" and "all natural laws" and transforms himself into a mystery. What Montague Tigg is, or appears to be, is a mystery too, in part because contradictory qualities are fused in him: "He was very dirty and very jaunty; very bold and very mean; very swaggering and very slinking; very much like a man who might have been something

better, and unspeakably like a man who deserved to be something worse" (44). His outer appearance defies the ordinary categorical oppositions, because the conflicting qualities coexist in his appearance, so that one cannot catch his real self in a rational way.

These versatile characters resort to a more artificial way of transformation; they manage to cast away a real self and assume another personality, defying integrity of personality. Mark Tapley's jollity is assumed appearance especially when he exerts himself to survive in the Valley of Eden, knowing there is no hope, but he is so insistent on the jolly part that he can hardly enact any other roles. Sairey Gamp is more skilful in wearing a variety of masks. She is so versatile an actor that she is always ready to pick up her cues and play different parts with "a face for all occasions" (297), and she also performs "swoons of different sorts, upon a moderate notice" (744). Dickens's narrator compares her swoons with Mould's funerals; as Mould and his men regard funerals as shows to be admired, Mrs Gamp is an actress ever conscious that she is on the stage. Montague Tigg can be even more skillful, and therefore more unstable, than Mrs Gamp in that, with no clear social station worth mentioning, he is in constant need of forging his own identity. At the first meeting with Pecksniff, he pretends to admire the genius which he fabricates out of the irredeemable sluggard, Chevy Slyme. Tigg manages to invent two personalities, one for himself and the other for Slyme, for this character seems to "have no existence separate or apart from his friend Tigg" (104). Old Martin also disguises himself to expose Pecksniff's vices, but his assumed character is decidedly different from the roles Gamp and Tigg perform in that the mask of meek old man imposes great

restrictions on him whereas the resilient characters, on the contrary, seem to enjoy extracting themselves from their static personalities.

The chief part Pecksniff plays is that of moralist, and it requires great artistic skill because he is no moralist at all, whereas Mark has less difficulty in playing the jolly part because of his inherent jollity. As a hypocrite, Pecksniff shows particular concerns for outer appearance; his enemies asserts that "a strong trustfulness in sounds and forms, was the master-key to Mr. Pecksniff's character" (16). He is supposed to have a calculating mind hidden behind the smooth appearance, but he seldom exposes it even when none to deceive is around. Even when the narrator shows that he is plotting by himself, the reader is not admitted into what his thoughts are.[13] His performance is not limited to the role of moral man. At the crisis that old Martin visits him while Jonas is at his house, he can get over the difficulty by assuming a georgic character: "Then Mr Pecksniff, gently warbling a stave, put on his garden hat, seized a spade, and opened the street door" (364). In this way, his actor-like versatility protects him from any serious damage. Like a pantomimic clown, he falls into awkward situations more often than any other character in Dickens's novel.[14] At his first appearance, he is knocked down by the door blown open by the wind in a manner that is not unlike the anonymous or hypothetical victims of irregular spaces. His frequent "pratfalls" enhance the pantomimic atmosphere in this novel. What

---

[13] Kathleen Tillotson touches on the fact that Pecksniff's thought is not revealed to us (162).

[14] Regarding Pecksniff as the archetypal clown to whose performances "the till" or "the pratfall" was essential, Lansbury says: "Is there any character in Dickens's world who is knocked down, or falls down with such frequency as Pecksniff?" (47).

makes his ordeals less serious is the fact that every time he gets into trouble, he makes a remarkable recovery, immediately to restore decent appearance. His first farcical discomfiture does not inflict a serious injury on him and he soon starts to enlighten his daughters with his famous moral oration, beginning by finding morality in "eggs" and other "worldly goods" (15). On another occasion, he abjectly fails in seducing Mary Graham, but the duration of his awkwardness goes no further than "a minute or two":

> For a minute or two, in fact, he was hot, and pale, and mean, and shy, and slinking, and consequently not at all Pecksniffian. But after that, he recovered himself, and went home with as beneficent an air as if he had been the High Priest of the summer weather. (458)

The invulnerability of the comic characters conforms to Dickens's own view of pantomime; in an article he contributes to *Household Words* in collaboration with W. H. Wills, he writes that in pantomime, "every one, in short, is so superior to all the accidents of life, though encountering them at every turn, that I suspect it to be the secret . . . of the general enjoyment which an audience of vulnerable spectators, liable to pain and sorrow, find in this class of entertainment."[15] Most, though not all, of the sufferings, including those of anonymous victims of irregular spaces, are depicted in the mode of pantomime, which Dickens adopts in creating the exuberant world of *Chuzzlewit*. It can be said that invulnerability of the comic characters like Pecksniff comes to a great extent from their constant rebirth, or

[15] Dickens and Wills, "A Curious Dance round a Curious Tree" (386).

transformation.

What distinguishes the comic characters most clearly from other characters is their verbal versatility. Several critics recognize the great accomplishment of language in *Chuzzlewit*,[16] and this honour owes much to such geniuses in speech as Pecksniff and Mrs Gamp. Their masterly use, or abuse, of language serves to liberate them from oppressive realities in that the irrational, or plenitudinous space removed from the ordinary world is created by their words. They often create their fictional selves through exploitation of language. In this light, language serves for them as a means of disguising. The fictional identities of Tigg and his friend exist only in his words; Pecksniff is judged by his elaborate speech, which makes Mrs Lupin look up to him as "a noble-spoken gentleman" (623); the fictional world that Mrs Gamp's language creates nearly always advertises her merits; hiding his real state of mind, Mark repeats that he is "jolly." Although their languages often partake of deception in that they create fictional selves by word as hypocrites do, they assume different personalities not so much for deception as for pleasure.

In most cases, Dickens seems to indulge in presenting their performances rather than to impeach them. This attitude clearly distinguishes them, say, from Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House*; in his case, the author's emphasis is on the harms his assumed innocence does to others. Mrs Lupin and other honest people do believe in Pecksniff's worthiness, but they suffer no clear harm for it: when he thinks he takes in old Martin, it is

---

[16] On the importance of language in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, see for example Marcus *Dickens* 217-221; and especially Polhemus *Comic Faith* 92-106.

in reality Pecksniff himself who is taken in; Mary and, earlier, Mrs Todgers are exposed to his prurience, but these events have little to do with his hypocrisy. The danger his hypocrisy would bring should be counted as small, if any. His mask contains something ridiculous that makes it easy to see through his respectable surface, what Chesterton calls a "transparent" mask (148). It is not to say that his evil mind is exhibited to other characters and the reader, but that it is improbable that his assumed personality might become a serious threat. He induces delight in those who believe in his worthiness, and laughter as well as hatred and scorn in those who do not. Thus young Martin and Mark laugh at his enemy when they glimpse Pecksniff immediately after their return from America: "In spite of the indignation with which this glimpse of Mr. Pecksniff inspired him, Martin could not help laughing heartily. Neither could Mark" (519).

Tigg's assumed personality is no less harmless before he changes his name. He succeeds in cheating no one but such a gullible character as Tom. It is more noteworthy that his performances are excessive, and that he continues to play a role even if there is no probability of his taking in anybody. One can say that most of his performances are gratuitous. The narrator tells us that he plays a fictional role for pecuniary motives, but, as Kincaid observes, on many occasions money does not seem to attract him very much (*Annoying* 81-82). Tigg performs "a neat ballet of action, spontaneously invented" for the purpose of expressing his admiration towards Chevy Slyme (105), but it is not clear of what use that ballet is for his selfish purpose. He seems to be more interested in pleasure he feels in his own performance than money it may bring. Gratuitousness of his

performance is even clearer when he gives a false address to David the pawnbroker. Although it is impossible to make David believe his false information because his poverty is all too evident, he indulges in dilating on the fiction, which finally draws laughter from David: "The shopman was so highly entertained by this piece of humour, that Mr. Tigg himself could not repress some little show of exultation" (211).

The other resilient characters also make gratuitous performances. As we have seen, it is not clear of what use Mark's innocent lie is if not merely for fun. Although the narrator tells us that Mrs Harris is invented specially for the selfish purpose of her creator, Mrs Gamp seems less interested in the advertisement Mrs Harris would give to her than the pleasure of indulging in the fictional world. Their falsity is similar to Bailey's "Frog's Hornpipe" (165) or his surprising feats: "he entertained them [Miss Pecksniffs] by thrusting the lighted candle into his mouth, and exhibiting his face in a state of transparency" (137). Embodying the spirit of popular amusements, they feel delight in their own innocent plays, however selfish they may seem, and impart some of their joy to others.

The Exuberant World of *Martin Chuzzlewit*

The comic characters of *Chuzzlewit* are very active in making a hilarious mood on festive occasions as if they are strung up to entertain others and themselves. At the party held in Todgers's, Pecksniff and Young Bailey are prominent in merging themselves into the hilarious sphere which in turn becomes more chaotic owing to them. What Pecksniff exposes under the influence of drink is not the evil mind allegedly hidden under his smooth

appearance, but a ludicrous, entertaining figure. Bailey, resigning the role of attendant, becomes an active participant of the party, and does remarkable feats "as if to express the Bacchanalian character of the meeting" (141). Mrs Gamp is even admirable when she makes a solitary effort to instill the festive mood into the tea-party:

> [Mrs Gamp] stopped between her sips of tea to favour the circle with a smile, a wink, a roll of the head, or some other mark of notice; and at those periods her countenance was lighted up with a degree of intelligence and vivacity, which it was almost impossible to separate from the benignant influence of distilled waters.
>
> Bur for Mrs Gamp, it would have been a curiously silent party. (665)

Mrs Gamp, along with Pecksniff, is sometimes so indulgent in drink that she may be blamed by the worldview that is supposed to be held by the novel, or the discourse dominated by old Martin. However, a different aesthetic concern is at work in the above passage to transform the scene that would be "silent," serious, and inert into something hilarious and grotesque that is made possible by the presence of Mrs Gamp. Before the funeral of Anthony, Pecksniff and Gamp feast merrily with Mould's men while old Chuffey laments over the deceased. The narrator finds in this situation "dismal joviality and grim enjoyment" (306). The grotesque coexistence of apparently incompatible elements is one of the most characteristic features of Dickens's writings, and especially *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

Exuberance of this book is also created by strange combinations of the seemingly incongruous scenes. Schwarzbach argues that, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens's interest in architecture has an "effect on tightening the organisation of the novel as a whole" (83). Dickens may be conscious of the organization, or construction of the novel, but the constructing principle of the novel seems far from "tightening". This novel itself is like a labyrinth, or a Gothic cathedral that contains various, incongruous elements, and continues to proliferate itself, to make fantastical space of pantomimic transformation.[17] All of Dickens's novels, especially the early ones have similar construction, but *Martin Chuzzlewit* is the most conspicuous in this respect, with so many examples of irregular architecture like Todgers's. What this comic novel as a whole forms with the hallucinating incongruities is, in effect, the exuberant, hilarious world.

---

[17] Peter Conrad writes of "Dickens's Gothic architecture" with many connotations among which is inclusiveness of various, often incompatible, elements (151). Robert Polhemus regards *The Old Curiosity Shop* as "a kind of secular, popular, literary cathedral, an accretive Gothic textual structure with chapels that emphasize different kinds of faith and include all kinds of beliefs in the crazy architecture of its fiction" ("Comic and Erotic Faith" 73-74). I think it is also the case with *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

Conclusion

The Rejection of Pecksniff

In his consideration of the development of Dickens's art as "myth", Geoffrey Thurley says: "The *dénouement* of *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a watershed in Dickens's creative life. It marks his recognition of the seriousness of the task that confronted him. . . . Dickens begins to phase out the comedy upon which so much of his reputation stands, and by which he made such a great contribution to the literature of the world" (104). After the rejection of Pecksniff and Gamp at the denouement of *Chuzzlewit*, Dickens's comedy really undergoes some change. With the decrease of comedy both in intensity and quantity, what I call pantomimic vision also suffers a marked diminution in the late Dickens. Pecksniff and Mrs Gamp are the most accomplished pantomime clown and dame in Dickens's characters, and their banishment from the novel seems to symbolize the author's withdrawal from the world of pantomime, and that of popular entertainment.

Edwin Eigner locates the beginning of the "dark Dickens" in *Bleak House*, regarding Wilkins Micawber in *David Copperfield* as "the

ultimate Clown . . . of all Dickens' novels."[1] Eigner's view is based on his preoccupation with the configuration of pantomime personages so that his notion of clown is defined by the role the character plays in the fixed pattern of pantomime as he sees it; in this light, Micawber is surely most representative of all Dickens's clownish figures. From another standpoint, however, subordination to the general concern of the work is not the way clowns perform, for, in pantomimic vision, constant transformations prevent them from staying in one steady position. Pecksniff is a more proper clown in this vision in that he for the most part forgets his role as a hypocritical villain and continues to show gratuitous knockabout performances. He does not virtually feel, or make us feel, any pain in his repeated pratfalls whereas Micawber does.[2]

Dickens begins with *Dombey and Son* to explore inner psychology, and discrepancy between the external and the internal, as is clearly seen in the presentation of Mr Dombey. Micawber is no exception to the general tendency towards psychological depth or complexity in the later novels. The disparity between Micawber's convivial appearance and his sheer irresponsibility behind it is so serious a matter embarrassing David, the central consciousness of *David Copperfield*, that the hero-narrator's attitude to him is mingled

---

[1] Eigner 150, 169-78.

[2] Roger B. Henkle notes Micawber's "pain": "Unlike the earlier Dickensian comic heroes, . . . [Micawber] cannot brazen through his misfortunes; he lacks the cheek of the Artful Dodger or Sairy [sic] Gamp and he registers too much social pain" (154).

with both disdain and sympathy: "slippery as Mr Micawber was, I was probably indebted to some compassionate recollection he retained of me as his boy-lodger, for never having been asked by him for money" (600). This problematic ambivalence on the part of the hero is, unlike the grotesquely rendered incongruities of Dickens's early novels, based on a serious psychological interest: it is evoked by Micawber's disturbing duality consisting of good appearance and "slippery" self, and at the same time, it articulates the complex interiority of David himself. Dickens comes to be more and more attracted to interiority after *Dombey*. Dickens's anti-elitism or anti-intellectualism is more remarkably found in the characters of his early comic novels; their inner psychology is not problematized because they have no fixed interiority, plainly exhibiting almost everything externally, or impudently claiming their plural identities. Most of them enjoy selfless, collective lives in the exuberant, celebrating world.

Such liberty is hardly given to characters and other details of the later novels, which pay more regard to the interest of the whole design. Kathleen Tillotson remarks that the "deliberate control of comic exaggeration and inventiveness marks one of the differences between *Dombey* and its predecessors" whereas, in *Chuzzlewit*, "the details mask the 'general purpose and design'" (159, 161). Unnecessary details—"florid little squiggle[s] on the edge of the page,"

according to George Orwell[3]—become less conspicuous in the later Dickens; they tend to fulfill some functions, subordinated to general concerns—the serious artistic concerns which are formal, ethical, social, symbolical, or psychological.[4]

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Dickens's early comic novels are marked by the emphasis on prolific details over the whole, with digressions, incongruities, inconsistencies, and varieties. These are characteristic features of the vision that Dickens's art shares with the popular entertainment, most notably with English pantomime. This pantomimic vision is operating at various levels of his early fictions: the patently loose construction that results in, or from, coexistence of heterogeneous realms and of incompatible worldviews, the grotesque description that with lists of details and incongruous combinations oscillates between reality and fancy, and the characterization which defies the dichotomy between external appearance and inner self. These textual features are, though generally disparaged by the realist and psychological criticisms of elite

---

[3] Orwell 61. This phrase is introduced after quoting an anecdote that a minor character named Jack Hopkins tells at the party of Bob Sawyer in *The Pickwick Papers.*

[4] Margaret Ganz finds in Dickens's later novels "the chronicle not only of a great gift by other considerations but also of a qualitative decline in the very nature of Dickens' comic vision" ("Vulnerable" 27). Although Ganz's concept of "comic vision" is slightly different from "pantomimic vision" as I term it, the latter is inseparable from Dickens's comedy insofar as it is prominent in his comic novels, and the declining tendency is an undeniable fact about these related "visions".

culture, not necessarily unrealistic because they are representations of what Dickens sees real life through his peculiar perception steeped in pantomimic vision.

I do not mean to suggest that the late Dickens is indifferent to contemporary popular entertainment; as Paul Schlicke demonstrates in *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*, his affection for it never waned all through life. Nevertheless, his view of entertainment presented in his novels underwent a decided change around *Dombey*, as Schlicke recognizes: "Dickens's middle and late fiction . . . betrays a growing pessimism about the possibilities of finding a place for entertainment in the new social fabric" (139). Such a pessimistic view does not necessarily reflect the contemporary state of society as the decline of popular entertainment was clear even when Dickens started his writing career. Rather, one should say that this view is the result of his growing consciousness of the task as a serious artist; the dark Dickens no longer shares a vision with popular entertainment, but champions it from a superior position.

His later novel *Hard Times* is an important work for the consideration of Dickens's relationship with popular entertainment in that Sleary and his circus performers play an important role. In its fancy/fact opposition, they unambiguously represent fancy, with which the whole novel aligns itself. Given this moral function, Sleary's circus seems too didactic to be a representative of popular entertainment. The circus proprietor simply articulates the moral judgment that the

whole novel sanctions when he says: "People must be amuthed" (41).[5] In comparison, Crummles's troupe in *Nicholas Nickleby* have so little to do with the whole structure of the novel that one may almost regard them as an unnecessary detail, another "florid little squiggle." Orwell goes on to say that "it is by just these squiggles that the special Dickens atmosphere is created" (61). Absorbing these apparently irrelevant details, Dickens's pantomimic vision typical of his early novels creates the world overflowing with hilarious energy.

What David Musselwhite dubs Dickens's "rhizomic style" is, as I mentioned, derived from his pantomimic vision. After pointing out that a "more authoritative and collected narrative control" comes to take over the rhizomic style around *Dombey and Son*, Musselwhite adds that the change "did not necessarily make him a better writer" (181). The formal, moral, social, and psychological aspects of Dickens's novels, which undoubtedly demand "narrative control," should not be made light of, but in these aspects, other nineteenth-century novelists compare favourably with him whereas he is unsurpassed in the grotesque art with its rich exuberance. It is not to say that his pantomimic vision cannot be found in his late novels, which in fact owe much to it, but its obvious waning is evident after *Chuzzlewit*. Writing regretfully about the change in the quality of Dickens's writing about the middle of his career, G. K. Chesterton observes that "[t]hat original violent vision of all things which [Dickens] had seen from his boyhood

---

[5] Sleary repeats these words in the penultimate chapter of *Hard Times*: "People mutht be amuthed" (272).

began to be mixed with other men's milder visions and with the light of common day" (180)—Dickens's "original violent vision" is precisely the pantomimic vision. After the rejection of Pecksniff, Dickens, for other concerns that do not quite suit him, sacrifices something important, something more like Dickens.

Works Cited

Andrews, Malcolm. "Introduction." *The Old Curiosity Shop.* By Charles Dickens. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972. 11-31.

Auerbach, Nina. *Private Theatricals: The Lives of the Victorians.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Auden, W. H. "Dingley Dell & The Fleet." *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays.* 1948. New York: Vintage, 1989. 407-28.

Axton, William. *Circle of Fire: Dickens' Vision and Style and the Popular Victorian Theatre.* Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966.

Baer, Florence E. "Wellerisms in *The Pickwick Papers.*" *Folklore* 94 (1983): 173-84.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World.* Trans. Hélèlne Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Barish, Jonas. *The Antitheatrical Prejudice.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

Benjamin, Edwin B. "The Structure of *Martin Chuzzlewit.*" *Philological Quarterly* 34 (1955): 39-47.

Bennett, Rachel. "Punch Versus Christian in *The Old Curiosity Shop.*" *Review of English Studies* 22 (1971): 423-34.

Booth, Michael R. *English Melodrama.* London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965.

---. *Prefaces to English Nineteenth-Century Theatre.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, n. d.

Bowen, John. *Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Brooks, Chris. *Signs for the Times: Symbolic Realism in the Mid-Victorian*

World. London: Allen, 1984.

Brooks, Peter. *Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess.* 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Burke, Alan R. "The House of Chuzzlewit and the Architectural City." *Dickens Studies Annual* 3 (1974): 14-40.

Butt, John E., and Kathleen Tillotson. *Dickens at Work.* London: Methuen, 1957.

Caillois, Roger. *Man, Play and Games.* Tr. Meyer Barash. 1961. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

Carey, John. "Introduction." *Nicholas Nickleby.* By Charles Dickens. Everyman's Library. New York: Knopf, 1993.

---. *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens' Imagination.* Second Edition. London: Faber, 1991.

Castle, Terry. *Masquerade and Civilization.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.

Chase, Karen. *Eros and Psyche: The Representation of Personality in Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, and George Eliot.* New York: Methuen, 1984.

Chesterton, G. K. *Charles Dickens.* 6th ed. London: Methuen, 1910.

Clark, Kenneth. *The Gothic Revival: An Essay on the History of Taste.* 1928. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962.

Clayborough, Arthur. *The Grotesque in English Literature.* 1965. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Cohen, Jane R. *Charles Dickens and His Original Illustrators.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980.

Collins, Philip. "'*Carol* Philosophy, Cheerful Views.'" *Etudes Anglaises* 23 (1970): 158-67.

---. "Queen Mab's Chariot among the Steam Engines: Dickens and 'Fancy'" *English Studies* 42 (1961): 78-90.

Collins, Wilkie. *Basil.* Ed. Dorothy Goldman. World's Classics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Connor, Steven. "Babel Unbuilding: The Anti-Archi-Rhetoric of *Martin Chuzzlewit.*" *Dickens Refigured: Bodies, Desire, and Other Histories.* Ed. John Schad. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.

---. "Introduction." *Charles Dickens.* Ed. Steven Connor. Longman Critical Readers. London: Longman, 1996.

Conrad, Peter. *The Victorian Treasure-House.* London: Collins, 1973.

Dickens, Charles. *American Notes and Pictures from Italy.* Ed. F. S. Schwarzbach and Leonée Ormond. Everyman Dickens. London: Dent, 1997.

---. *David Copperfield.* Ed. Trevor Blound. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966.

---. *Great Expectations.* Ed. Robin Gilmour. Everyman Dickens. London: Dent, 1994.

---. *Hard Times.* Ed. Grahame Smith. Everyman Dickens. London: Dent, 1994.

---. *The Letters of Charles Dickens.* Ed. Madeline House et al. 12 vols. to date. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965- .

---. *Martin Chuzzlewit.* Ed. Michael Slater. Everyman Dickens. London: Dent, 1994.

---. *Nicholas Nickleby.* Ed. Michael Slater. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.

---. *The Old Curiosity Shop.* Ed. Elizabeth M. Brennan. Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.

---. *The Old Curiosity Shop.* Ed. Paul Schlicke. Everyman Dickens. London: Dent, 1995.

---. *Oliver Twist.* Ed. Steven Connor. Everyman Dickens. London: Dent, 1994.

---. "The Pantomime of Life." *The Mudfog Papers.* Pocket Classics. Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1987. 74-83.

---. *The Pickwick Papers.* Ed. Malcolm Andrews. Everyman Dickens. London: Dent, 1998.

---. "Two Views of a Cheap Theatre." *The Uncommercial Traveller and Reprinted Pieces.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958. 29-39.

Dickens, Charles, and W. H. Wills. "A Curious Dance Round a Curious Tree." *Household Words* (17 January 1852): 138-39.

Duncan, Ian. *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Dyson, A. E. *The Inimitable Dickens: A Reading of the Novels.* London: Macmillan, 1970.

Easson, Angus. "Emotion and Gesture in *Nicholas Nickleby.*" *Dickens Quarterly* 5 (1988): 136-51.

Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. "Anti-Clerical Gothic: The Tales of the Sisters in *Nicholas Nickleby.*" *Modern Language Review* 94 (1999): 1-10.

Eigner, Edwin M. *The Dickens Pantomime.* Berkeley' University of California Press, 1989.

Forster, John. *The Life of Charles Dickens.* 1872-74. Ed. A. J. Hoppé. Rev.

ed. 2 vols. Everyman Library. London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1969.

Fowler, Roger. "Polyphony and Problematic in *Hard Times*." *The Changing World of Charles Dickens*. Ed. Robert Giddings. London: Vision Press, 1983.

Frankl, Paul. *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960.

Franklin, J. Jeffrey. *Serious Play: The Cultural Form of the Nineteenth-Century Realist Novel*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.

Gager, Valerie L. *Shakespeare and Dickens: The Dynamics of Influence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Galvin, John. "Dickens and Theatre." *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*. Ed. John O. Jordan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 189-203.

Ganz, Margaret. "*Nicholas Nickleby*: The Victories of Humor." *Mosaic* 9 (1975): 131-48.

---. "The Vulnerable Ego: Dickens' Humor in Decline." *Dickens Studies Annual* 2 (1970): 23-40, 276-80.

Gardner, Joseph H. "Pecksniff's Profession: Boz, Phiz, and Pugin." *Dickensian* 72 (1976): 75-86.

Garis, Robert. *The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Gilchrist, Andrea. "The Power of the Grotesque in *Great Expectations*." *Dickensian* 388 (1979): 75-83.

Gilmour, Robin. *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context*

of English Literature. London: Longman, 1993.

Goldberg, Michael. *Carlyle and Dickens.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972.

Guerard, Albert J. *The Triumph of the Novel: Dickens, Dostoevsky, Faulkner.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Hadley, Elaine. *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Hardy, Barbara. "Dickens's Storytellers." *Dickensian* 69 (1973): 71-78.

Harvey, J. R. *Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators.* London: Sidgwick, 1970.

Heilman, Robert Bechtold. *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968.

Henkle, Roger B. *Comedy and Culture: England 1820-1900.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Hennelly, Mark M., Jr. "Carnivalesque 'Unlawful Games' in *The Old Curiosity Shop.*" *Dickens Studies Annual* 22 (1993): 67-120.

---. "Dickens's Praise of Folly: Play in *The Pickwick Papers.*" *Dickens Quarterly* 3 (1986): 27-45.

Herbert, Christopher. "Converging Worlds in *Pickwick Papers.*" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 27 (1972): 1-20.

Hill, Nancy K. *A Reformer's Art: Dickens' Picturesque and Grotesque Imagery.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981.

Hollington, Michael. *Dickens and the Grotesque.* London: Croom Helm, 1984.

---. 'Dickens's Conception of the Grotesque.' *Dickensian* 76 (1980): 91-99.

[Hood, Thomas]. Rev. of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, vol. 1, by Charles

Dickens. *Athenaeum* 7 Nov. 1840: 887-88.

Horton, Susan R. "Swivellers and Snivellers: Competing Epistemologies in *The Old Curiosity Shop*." *Dickens Quarterly* 7 (1990): 212-17.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*. New York: Methuen, 1985.

John, Juliet. *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963.

Kincaid, James R. *Annoying the Victorians*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

---. *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1971.

Lansbury, Coral. "Pecksniff and Pratfalls." *Dramatic Dickens*. Ed. Carol Hanbery MacKay. New York: St. Martin's, 1989. 45-51.

Leavis, F. R., and Q. D. Leavis. *Dickens the Novelist*. London: Chatto, 1970.

Litvak, Joseph. *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Lodge, David. *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*. London: Routledge, 1990.

McCarthy, Patrick J. "The Language of *Martin Chuzzlewit*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 20 (1984): 638-49.

MacKay, Carol Hanbery. "The Melodramatic Impulse in *Nicholas Nickleby*." *Dickens Quarterly* 5 (1988): 152-63.

McMaster, Juliet. *Dickens the Designer*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987.

Manning, Sylvia. "*Nicholas Nickleby*: Parody on the Plains of Syria." *Dickens Studies Annual* 23 (1994): 73-92.

Marcus, Steven. *Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey.* New York: Simon, 1965.

---. "Language into Structure: Pickwick Revisited." *Daedalus* 101 (1972): 183-202.

Mayer, David, III. *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime, 1806-1836.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969.

Meisel, Martin. *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Miller, J. Hillis. *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958.

---. "The Fiction of Realism: *Sketches by Boz, Oliver Twist,* and Cruikshank's Illustrations." *Dickens Centennial Essays.* Ed. Ada Nisbet and Blake Nevius. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. 85-153.

---. "Sam Weller's Valentine." *Literature in the Market Place.* Ed. John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten. Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 5. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 93-122.

Monod, Sylvère. *Martin Chuzzlewit.* Unwin Critical Library. London: Allen, 1985.

Musselwhite, David E. *Partings Welded Together: Politics and Desire in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel.* London: Methuen, 1987.

Newman, S. J. *Dickens at Play.* New York: St. Martin's, 1981.

Orwell, George. *Dickens, Dali, and Others.* San Diego: Harcourt, 1946.

Pearson, Gabriel. "*The Old Curiosity Shop.*" *Dickens and the Twentieth Century.* Ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson. London: Routledge, 1962.

77-90.

Polhemus, Robert M. *Comic Faith: The Great Tradition from Austen to Joyce.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

---. "Comic and Erotic Faith Meet Faith in the Child: Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* ('The Old Cupiosity Shape')." *Critical Reconstructions: The Relationship of Fiction and Life.* Ed. Robert M. Polhemus and Roger B. Henkle. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. 71-89.

Pratt, Branwen Bailey. "Dickens and Freedom: Young Bailey in *Martin Chuzzlewit.*" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 30 (1975): 185-99.

Prince, Gerald. *A Dictionary of Narrtology.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987.

Rem, Tore. "Playing Around with Melodrama: The Crummles Episodes in *Nicholas Nickleby.*" *Dickens Studies Annual* 25 (1996): 267-85.

Rogers, Philip. "Mr. Pickwick's Innocence." *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 27 (1972): 21-37.

Rosenberg, Brian. *Little Dorrit's Shadows: Character and Contradiction in Dickens.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996.

Sadrin, Anny. "Fragmentation in *The Pickwick Papers.*" *Dickens Studies Annual* 22 (1993): 21-34.

Sanders, Andrew. *Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist.* New York: St Martin's, 1982.

Saunders, Mary. "Lady Dedlock Prostrate: Drama, Melodrama, and Expressionism in Dickens's Floor Scenes." *Dramatic Dickens.* Ed. Carol Hanbery MacKay. London: Macmillan, 1989. 68-80.

Schlicke, Paul. *Dickens and Popular Entertainment.* London: Unwin Hyman,

1985.

---. "Crummles Once More." *Dickensian* 86 (1990): 3-16.

Schwarzbach, F. S. *Dickens and the City.* London: Athlone, 1979.

Sell, Roger D. "Dickens and the New Historicism: the Polyvocal Audience and Discourse of *Dombey and Son.*" *The Nineteenth-Century British Novel.* Ed. Jeremy Hawthorn. London: Edward Arnold, 1986. 63-79.

Slater, Michael. "Introduction." *Nicholas Nickleby.* By Charles Dickens. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978. 13-31.

Smith, Grahame. *The Novel and Society: Defoe to George Eliot.* London: Batsford, 1984.

Steig, Michael. "Abuse and the Comic-Grotesque in *The Old Curiosity Shop.*" *Dickens Quarterly* 11 (1994): 103-14.

---. "Structure and the Grotesque in Dickens: *Dombey and Son; Bleak House.*" *Centennial Review* 14 (1970): 313-30.

Stewart, Garrett. *Dickens and the Trials of Imagination.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974.

Thurley, Geoffrey. *The Dickens Myth: Its Genesis and Structure.* St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1976.

Tillotson, Kathleen. *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1954.

Van Ghent, Dorothy. "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's." *Sewanee Review* 58 (1950): 419-38.

---. *The English Novel: Form and Function.* 1953. New York: Harper, 1967.

Vlock, Deborah. *Dickens, Novel Reading, and the Victorian Popular Theatre.* Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 19. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Weinrich, Harald. *Le Temps: le récit et le commentaire.* Tr. Michèle Lacoste. Paris: Seuil, 1973.

Welsh, Alexander. *From Copyright to Copperfield: The Identity of Dickens.* Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1987.

Wilson, Angus. *The World of Charles Dickens.* London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1970.

Worth, George J. *Dickensian Melodrama: A Reading of the Novels.* University of Kansas Humanistic Studies 50. Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1978.

Zemka, Sue. "From the Punchmen to Pugin's Gothics: The Broad Road to Sentimental Death in *The Old Curiosity Shop.*" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 48 (1993): 291-325.